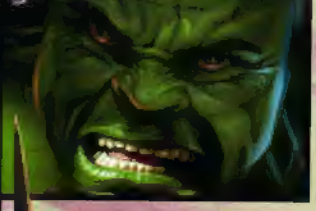

MOVIE PREVIEW!

HULK, SPIDEY 2, SUPERMAN & MORE!

EXCLUSIVE HEROCLIX OFFER INSIDE!

WIZARD

THE JLA BY ALEX ROSS
(from left) Batman, Martian Manhunter, Black Canary and Hawkgirl

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3 MONTHS TO WIZARD zero

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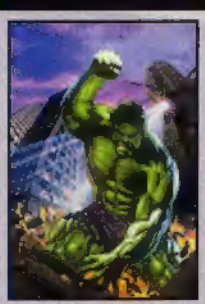
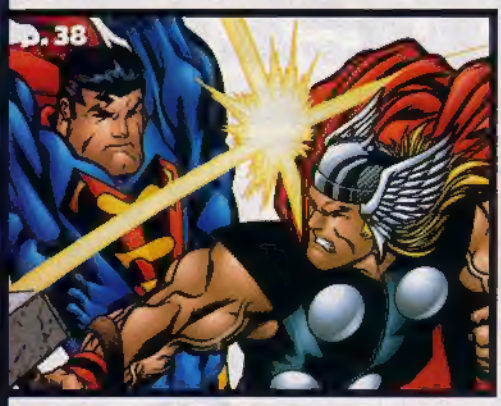
ON THE COVERS



The **Hulk** movie cover (**left**) was painted by Greg Horn. For details on "Hulk" and all your other favorite comic-related movies, head over to **page 98**! The **JLA** cover (**right**) was painted by Alex Ross. For a look at what's coming up with the League, jump over to **page 80**.



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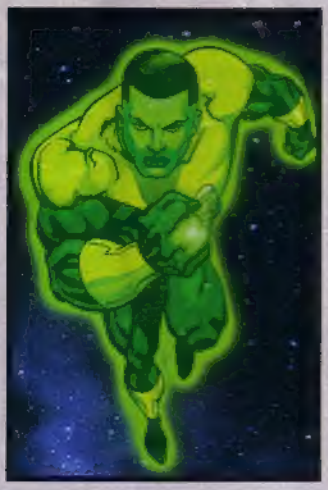
COOL STUFF THROUGH THE MAIL

EXCLUSIVE OFFER

GREEN MACHINE



Now's your chance to own the VERY FIRST Green Lantern ever produced for WizKids' HeroClix game! And it's none other than John Stewart, the Green Lantern that stars in Cartoon Network's "Justice League" cartoon and current member of DC Comics' *JLA* series. For details on how to get this exclusive, must-have collectible, head over to **page 32** and get in on all the action!

FROM THE TOP

HOLLYWOOD HEROES

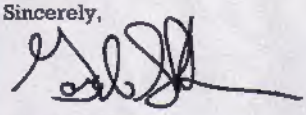
Superheroes are invading a Cineplex near you this summer and we've got their battle plan!

Check out our mega-movie preview on **page 98** for the lowdown on everything from "Hulk" to "Spider-Man 2." And speaking of previews, not only do we have a nine-page sneak peek at DC's highly anticipated *Teen Titans* relaunch (**page 42**) by Geoff Johns (*JSA*) and Mike McKone (*Exiles*), but we've also got an exclusive seven-page first look at another major DC project: *Superman: Birthright* (**page 52**) by Mark Waid (*Fantastic Four*) and Leinil Yu (*Wolverine*).

Then flip on over to **page 80** for a rundown on all things Justice League in our JLA Mamma Jamma feature—with exclusive *Justice League: Liberty and Justice* preview art from Alex Ross! This issue also features our second annual WizCATS trivia challenge (**page 72**) with the toughest questions we could devise. If all that weren't enough, we also profile Brian Michael Bendis, the most powerful creator in comics, on **page 88**!

So sit down and take a load off. We've already done all the work, all you have to do is read it and enjoy.

Sincerely,



Gareb Shamus

P.S. Wonder what that cover icon alluding to *Wizard* #0 is all about? I can only say it will be the most spectacular event in this magazine's 12 year history. You probably won't see much of me this summer 'cuz we're slaving away to make *Wizard* #0 blow you away. The countdown has begun...

BY THE NUMBERS

Statistics compiled when we put this bad boy together

Times the word "testicles" appears in this issue, including this time	2
Staffers who wept privately at the news of "Buffy's" cancellation	11
Staffers who received cease-and-desist letters for stalker-like letters sent to "Buffy" star Sarah Michelle Gellar	2
Questions generated by the staff for the WizCATS II feature (see p. 72)	573
Comic celebrities who answered question #47 correctly	0
Movies covered in our Spandex Preview	30
Times the lead of the "Superman" film changed during production	9
Staffers who offered to audition for the lead (Super Serwin pictured at left)	1
Characters artist Phil Jimenez rendered for his JLA feature opener (see p. 80)	95
Inches deep into a chocolate mousse cake Managing Editor Andy Serwin plunged his face on a dare	3
Number of days later Serwin was still pulling chocolate out of his beard	4
Times the word "testicles" appears in this issue, including *this* time	3

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PHONE *(212) 765-5700* FAX *(212) 765-5778*
SALES ASSISTANTS *Jennifer Karilla and Amy Sasur*
PHONE *(914) 268-3907* FAX *(914) 268-5386*
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CUSTOMER SERVICE *Jennifer Ali*
PHONE *(845) 268-3594* E-MAIL *subscriptions@wizarduniverse.com*

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING
DIRECTOR *Alison James, Trio Marketing Services*
PHONE *(203) 266-7110* FAX *(203) 266-7661* E-MAIL *ajtrio@aol.com*
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT *Deirdre Brooks*

ENTERTAINMENT CONVENTIONS, INC.
SHOW MANAGER & SALES *Brenda Cook (845) 268-8068*

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MAGIC WORDS

NAZI TYRANNOSAURUS... PURPLE PEOPLE-EATERS... AND FLUID-FILLED FILIMENTS!

"The Great Unknown," an article highlighting the bestest underrated comic stories you've probably never heard of from *Wizard* #139 has generated a lot of mail.

And read on this month to find out how I'll soon become a Great Unknown. Or at least an Unknown.

Dear Wizard,

I wanted to thank you for the kind words in your "Top 10 Underrated Creators" sidebar in *Wizard* #139. The whole article was great and it was wonderful to be included in the list of talented artists and writers. When I chose to become an inker, I knew inking was not as "high profile" a job as pencilling, but it's a job I love to do and I've always considered quality and reliability more important than name recognition.

I'm very flattered! Thanks again.

Scott Hanna
Inker to the Comics World

Well, too bad, Scott—your name is well-recognized in our hallowed halls.

Scott's work over Tom Raney's pencils on *Thor* (and DC's upcoming *Outsiders*) was of particular note of late. And you can always catch him laying down the blacks over John Romita Jr.'s grays on *Amazing Spider-Man*.

Dear Wizard,

I enjoyed your article on the 10 most underrated comic stories. But I thought it was going to focus on the most underrated comic series. I can think of a few, myself...

- *Aztek, The Ultimate Man* (1996-1997): Some of the best writing Grant Morrison ever did was on this late-'90s DC series. It was a great take on superheroes with an original concept and some damn cool fights. Morrison gave us one of the best and most terrifying takes on the Joker ever, and even made Amazo and the Parasite cool as hell.
- *Major Bummer* (1997-1998): This was one of the funniest comics ever published, with a supporting cast that generated more laughs than any sitcom out there. They fought Nazi Tyrannosaurus Rexes! How could they [DC] can this series?
- *Stars and S.T.R.I.P.E.* (1999-2000): Geoff Johns is a great writer, even back then! We can even see the groundwork for stories in Johns' later [DC] work, *JSA* and *Hawkman*. A shame this book didn't go further.
- *Slingers* (1998-1999): A neat concept of four teens, each with their own secret, forced to work together as a team. You guys at *Wizard* liked this [Marvel] series, but sadly, too few other people agreed.
- *Power Company* (2002-2003): This [DC title] is the most underrated comic on the market today. A great idea for a superhero team, clashes between teammates that actually make sense, and Kurt Busiek has managed to transform Dr. Polaris into a badass! You guys should do a "Book of the Month" on this so more people jump on.

Just a few ideas. I'm sure you have more.

Michael Weyer
Oak Brook, IL

One of the best and most underrated series to me

PHOTO: PAUL EDMILES

BUNNY AWARD

Dear Wizard,

Has there been any news on Jordan Atherton's health? It's been a while since we've heard anything about her condition.

Ricky T. Butler Jr.
Burkeville, VA

For those of you joining us late, Jordan Atherton is the niece of Marvel artist John Romita Jr. She was diagnosed with brain cancer at two years old, and required massive medical treatment. Romita staged a *Guinness Book of World Records*-worthy 51-hour draw-a-thon last year to raise over $25,000 to help her cause. And it worked. Little Jordan Atherton is in remission and on the road to recovery.

"Jordan just passed her three-month brain scan with no change," explains Kathy Romita, John Jr.'s wife. "The longer she stays this way, the better her chances. Her immune system seems to be working well—she just fought off an ear infection—and she had her first day at pre-school last week. She even ran into her class without saying goodbye to Mommy!"

Good news, indeed.

is *Jon Sable Freelance*, a Mike Grell-written-and-drawn First Comics title from the '80s where a former Olympic athlete grows cold and becomes a mercenary after his family is killed. Great emotional, funny, and action-packed stuff. As to your list:

• *Aztek*: Never read it, but I've heard many good things about it. I'll have to give it a try.

• *Major Bummer*: Damn, but I loved this book. And it is well-remembered. I still get letters about it to this day.

• *Stars and S.T.R.I.P.E.*: I remember praising it in this very column. Geoff Johns called to say "Thanks" at the time, and later bought me dinner at my favorite Mexican restaurant, Paco's Tacos. The enchilada was good. The book was better.

• *Slingers*: Damn good book. Nice to see that the artist, ChrisCross, has continued to further his career by working on *Captain Marvel*. And writer Joseph Harris ain't doing too bad, either. He just wrote the hit movie "Darkness Falls."

• *Power Company*. I'm not reading it. But given the company you've placed it in, perhaps I should.

Dear Wizard,

A few years ago, you guys threw yourselves a party because you reached the milestone of 100 issues. Sadly, I was not enthusiastic. But today, I know just how you felt because *my* 100th issue has arrived, and it couldn't have been more perfect.

October 1994's *Wizard* #38 was the first issue of your mag that I picked up all those years ago. Of course, Wolverine was on the cover, and the "bad girl" trend was in full effect. *Gen*^{13} #1 was sitting pretty as the number one comic, and Spawn was the cream of the crop on your "Top Ten Heroes and Villains" chart. After devouring the issue, I eagerly anticipated the next, and the rest is history.

So here I am, at *Wizard* #138, and like I said, it was a perfect celebration. I love writer Jeph Loeb's work (bought everything he's done since *X-Force* #44-including *Kaboom*), and imagine my elation when I find out Loeb is the star of #138's Q&A!

I just want to extend my thanks to you guys for putting out a great magazine every month for the past 100 months. Keep up the good work, and see you next month.

James Stokes
Jacksonville, FL

And would ya believe it? *Wizard* #138 was one of our rare issues *without* Wolverine on the cover.

Dear Jim,

Every month, *Wizard* talks about how old B-grade characters are getting A-grade talent. We all know the result: kickass books.

Well, I have a theory on why these characters weren't kicking ass before: There are no bad characters, only bad writers.

Artists have their place, and I love 'em, don't get me wrong. But *writers* make or break characters. I could do down the "Top 10 Creators" list of writers in your magazine, and they all write hot books now that a few years ago people would roll their eyes at: *Daredevil*, *JSA*, *Flash*, *Incredible Hulk*, and so on. No one is laughing at those books now—we're all too busy reading them all.

I don't think writers get half the credit they deserve. And they deserve more than anyone else.

Sam Miller
Atlanta, GA

Ah, the old rivalries: Celtics vs. Lakers. McDonalds vs. Burger King. Me vs. hangovers, and comic artists vs. comic writers.

Not that it *has* to be a rivalry, at least not to David

HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

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Mack, a man who straddles that line as both a writer and artist for titles such as *Kabuki* and *Daredevil*. "I agree that good characters and characterization are all in the execution," Mack says. "But the execution doesn't end with the writer."

Mack calls comics "a unique hybrid form of art and story, emphasis on the 'hybrid.' Once you break comics apart into categories, those components don't work to full effect in singular fashion. But when they're put together the right way, the whole is *much* greater than the sum of its parts."

And Mack is doing his part. "Whenever I write a book for another artist, I'm writing *specifically* for the characterization that artist is going to imbue the story with," he says. "The art should tell the story and the words should be a part of the art. You shouldn't be able to tell where one leaves off and the other begins."

PALISADES
A REAL AMERICAN HERO
G.I.JOE
*Approximately 7 inches tall
G.I.JOE
SCARLETT
MINI BUST
*Approximately 14 inches tall
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Dear Wizard,

Do you think one of the greatest writers in comics, Kevin Smith (who also writes some of the best dialogue) would ever write an issue of the biggest-mouthed (and thus, most-dialogued) character at Marvel? That being Deadpool, the merry merc-with-a-mouth? What are the chances?

Heath Tipton
twilightsdawn@hotmail.com

Not good.

"Unfortunately, I've never read a single issue of *Deadpool*, nor read a story in which Deadpool made an appearance," Smith says. "I am woefully inadequate when it comes to Deadpool. Hell, I'm woefully inadequate when it comes to most things. That's why I stick to some of the bigger guns such as Spider-Man, or cats I really like such as Green Arrow. I'd have to read up on Deadpool first."

Dear Wizard,

Remember "Amalgam"? Smooshing Marvel and DC characters together to create all-new characters? Well, here's six Amalgams I'd like to see:

1) DC's Sun Eater and Marvel's Purple Man equal...The Purple People Eater. That one's great on name alone.

2) Green Lantern Guy Gardner from DC plus Black Bolt from Marvel could equal...Bolt Guy!

Bolt Guy owns "Sidekicks," a superhero bar. Bolt Guy fires blinding blasts of energy from a spoon slotted into the back of his skull. If you get hit, you get thirsty.

3) Fantastic Four's the Thing and DC's Captain Marvel equals...Marvel Man!

When Ben Grimm shouts "My Aunt Petunia!" a mystic bolt gives him the STRENGTH OF HERCULES, the BEAUTY OF APOLLO, the SEX DRIVE OF ZEUS, and THE JEALOUSY OF HERA. Yancy Street will never be the same again!

4) Marvel's Dr. Strange and DC's Plastic Man equal...Dr. Plastic!

After Dr. Stephen Plastic meets The Ancient One, he is forced

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QUICK HITS

Here's a question for you: Who would you rather get your ass kicked by? The Jennifer Garner Elektra or the Lynda Carter Wonder Woman? Oh, the possibilities!

—Jason Kreul, jkreul@madison.com

I'm glad *Wizard* finally acknowledges the incredibleness of *Promethea* ["Magic Words," #139]. It's fast becoming obvious that this is Alan Moore's best work ever.

—Mike Edwards, mountainedwards@aol.com

Kia Asamiya is an excellent artist, and "pointy nose" is just his style. I can't wait to read his *Uncanny X-Men* books!

—Benjamin Baker, Paupack, PA

Crayon stick-figures couldn't run me off writer Chuck Austen's *Uncanny X-Men*.

—Paula Rice, Holyoke, MA

Seeing a Brian Bolland *Zatanna* cover is indeed…magic. Did I just say that?

—Bruce Chadwick, Norman, OK

I've seen *Teen Titans* revamps, like, six times already. Do I really need to see more?

—Sunny Felde, Rothschild, MA

Steve Skroce's *Doc Frankenstein* [*Wizard* #139] looks TOTALLY bad-ass! I can't wait to read the comic!

—Franklyn Bustamonte, Clovis, CA

Thanks for that great "Great Unknown" article [*Wizard* #139]. Nice to see some lesser-known writers and artists such as Guy Davis, John Ostrander, Tom Mandrake and Brent Anderson get the spotlight.

—Walter Lee, Pocatello, ID

Darick Robertson is one of the most underrated artists in comics. I hope *Wolverine* gets him the recognition he deserves.

—Duncan Kaleven, Baltimore, MD

My wait is finally over! *Kingdom Come* action figures are on the way!

—Henry Rossington, Orlando, FL

ABBEY CHASE OF *DANGER GIRL*

Others have said it, I'll say it again: *Y: The Last Man* is the most fascinating and original take on a comic story in years.

—Matt Bergen, Madison, WI

Great to see *Danger Girl* [at left]–ANY *Danger Girl*–comics back in publication, even if J. Scott Campbell isn't drawing.

—Bob Tufts, Gardena, CA

Please Marvel: Venom has been away for a long time, because he was originally over-exposed. Don't make the same mistake twice!

—Talance Withers, Compton, CA

Out of all the "Tsunami" titles, *New Mutants* is the one I'm most looking forward to. I've been looking for a fresh take on those characters for years.

—Rich Alphonse, Talbot, OK

into a confrontation with the Mindless Ones. A screwed-up spell and an energy blast from a Mindless One combine to make Dr. Plastic "Master Of The Credit Card." By the PIN Numbers of American Excess and The Winds of Wicked Interest Rates, Dr. Plastic casts thee into the Depths of Eternal Debt until you can't even remember what a dollar bill looked like!

5) Jamie Madrox the Multiple Man from Marvel and DC's sultry Black Canary equals…Dark Flock!

When you need a hero, Mad Jamie Bird transforms into 800 1-lb. black canaries that sing in 800-part harmonies, attack with their armor-piercing wingtips, and leave mounds of stinking bird poop everywhere.

6) Marvel's High Evolutionary and DC's Big Barda of the New Gods equals…Big Mama!

Big Mama gives birth to a superior being once a day, has the power to confuse superhuman males, and she's got quite the harem already.

Thornton Kimes
Seattle, WA

And who says there are no new ideas in comics any more?

Hey Jim,

1) Will you be leaving *Wizard* now that you have a job with Top Cow?

2) Did Marc Silvestri sway you to his company with women or with booze?

3) I'm surprised I haven't seen a few pages devoted to the story in *Wizard* yet. Care to clarify?

Wes Rangel
gravit8ion@aol.com

1) My final issue will be #143. Start weeping now. After that, I'll be working with *Wizard* solely on our Wizard World conventions.

2) He swayed me with women with booze.

3) Full details are under seal pending certain entanglements stemming from incidents requiring the involvement of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. See the above "women with booze" comment.

'Sup, Jim,

Regarding Spider-Man's "organic" webs from the 2002 movie, nobody seems to take into account that the organic webbing is coming from Spidey's own body. So my question is: Shouldn't he run out of webs at some point? What do you think?

Jeff Duvall
Portland, OR

I think you have too much time on your hands, and your tastes run to the disgusting.

I also think in all things science-y, I turn to James Kakalios, professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Minnesota. The prof says, "whether or not Mr. Duvall has too much time on his hands, I cannot say. But regarding Peter Parker's finite reservoir of organic webbing, he is completely correct.

"Assume that Spidey's webbing is similar to a real spider's dragline silk webbing, which is stronger than

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REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER!

WINWINWINWIN!

TALENT CONTEST UPDATE!

In *Wizard* #138, we asked aspiring pencilers, inkers and colorist to take a stab at becoming Top Cow Productions' next superstar, and with hundreds of entries flooding in, there's still time to make your comic book career dreams come true. Ambitious talents can visit **TopCow.com** and download scripts to draw, penciled pages to ink or fully-inked pages to color. (No crayons, please!) One penciler, inker and colorist will each win a six-month internship at Top Cow in Los Angeles where they'll work side-by-side with the Cow's top artists, such as head honcho Marc Silvestri. In addition to the internship, all three winners receive a place to live during their internship, as well as an airline ticket to get you there. The three future comic legends will also receive airfare and hotel accommodations to Wizard World Chicago 2003 (August 8-10, 2003), where they'll be introduced to the world as the contest winners at the Top Cow panel.

Please send Wizard photocopies or digital files of your pencils, inks or colors (no originals please) to:

Become a Top Cow Superstar
c/o Wizard Entertainment
P.O. Box 118
Congers, NY 10920-0118

steel cable and more elastic than nylon. Dragline silk's properties result from thousands of rigid filaments a few billionths of a meter wide interspersed with fluid-filled channels which distribute the tensile force along the length of the webbing. The webbing is essentially 'filled' with water, and Spider-Man would become severely dehydrated the more he used his webbing.

"In continuous use, he would eventually 'run dry' and would need to eat and drink in order to provide his body with the raw materials to replenish his supply of web fluid. For the obligatory smutty joke here, I turn back to *Wizard*."

Hell, I'll just leave it to the next reader:

Dear Wizard,

Since Spider-Man has organic web shooters in the movies, if he doesn't "blast off" enough webs during the day, does it happen during his sleep? Maybe he has nocturnal web emissions and wakes up with his sheets stuck to hands?

Andy Payton
Augusta, GA

Hey, now there's an idea! Maybe this could be explored in "Spider-Man 2" to make the character more identifiable. After all, what fanboy *hasn't* had that problem? And usually with a copy of *National Geographic* on the nightstand.

Okay, that's it. We wind down the clock. Back in 30 days. Until then, I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin.

—Jim McLauchlin

Jim McLauchlin will star in a remake of "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly," where he'll play all three roles. Emphasis on "The Ugly."

Send letters to:
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Congers, NY 10920
or e-mail us at JMcLauch@aol.com

Please address all subscription /renewal/ #1/2 comic/toy offer concerns to:
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E-mail: subscriptions@wizarduniverse.com
(Please include your full name, address and phone number and be as detailed as possible.)

IN THE BEGINNING

Retelling origins ranks as the hottest current trend in comics

ICE, ICE BABY The government's the villain, Cap's just chillin'

Marvel and DC have always been good at making comic book history, but recently, they've gotten pretty good at rewriting it.

Over the past year, the Big Two have unleashed a steady stream of "origin" stories that harken back to the early years of some of their biggest icons. *Truth: Red, White and Black* shattered the glossy veneer of Captain America's past. *Batgirl: Year One* unveiled the early days of Barbara Gordon's crimefighting career. *Unstable Molecules* exposed the "real life" inspiration behind comics' first family, the Fantastic Four.

And that's only the beginning, as both Marvel and DC gear up to unleash a fresh wave of origin tales in the coming months. From Mark Waid's *Superman: Birthright* (check out our exclusive preview on **page 52**!) to *Hulk: Gray*, the latest color book from Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, the future looks bright for stories about the past.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: ICE

The story has become American legend: Captain America falls into the freezing waters of the North Atlantic near the end of World War II and is preserved in ice, to be discovered years later by the Avengers.

But what if Cap's freezing wasn't an accident?

That's the premise behind "Ice," a five-part storyline by Chuck Austen and Jae Lee that started with April's *Captain America* #12. According to Austen, the idea originally came from a scene written by former *Cap* scribe John Ney Reiber. "I decided it would make sense that the U.S. government needed to freeze him because they had to do something horrible that he wouldn't approve of, and they were afraid he might actually turn against them," explained Austen. "Being that he was frozen before Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I thought, 'Maybe they wanted to get him out of the way so he couldn't stop them from bombing the Japanese.'" All hell breaks loose when military films documenting the freezing process are sent to Cap by a mysterious secret source.

PUNISHER: BORN

Frank Castle's crusade against crime began when his family was gunned down by the mob in Central Park—or so we thought.

As Garth Ennis reveals in June's four-issue MAX mini-series, the roots of the vigilante's rage go back even further, to his horrific experiences as a young Marine in the hellish jungles of Vietnam.

"Garth had originally said that he really wanted to do a Vietnam story starring Frank," said Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada. "When we got the scripts, we realized that Garth had actually written a Punisher origin that explains so much about the character without ever saying a word about it. It's truly brilliant the way it's constructed."

Not surprising, given the scribe's lengthy tenure on Marvel Knight's *Punisher* series. And with *Wolverine* artist Darick Robertson's gritty style setting the mood, expect plenty of tension and wartime violence.

KINGPIN

Ambition. Hard work. And the willingness to knock off your enemies.

That's how Wilson Fisk went from lowly street thug to the Kingpin of organized crime.

Starting in June, writer Bruce Jones (*Incredible Hulk*) and artist Sean Phillips (*Sleeper*) chronicle the rise to power of Daredevil's most powerful foe in a new ongoing series. "We'll see Wilson Fisk encounter all the conflicts inherent in gaining the high ground in the world of big time crime—and at a young age," revealed Jones. "He has the advantage of superior intellect over his older antagonists. He's ruthless with ambition and youth, maybe even morally bankrupt—but he also believes that crime is a business, and he utilizes more efficient methods for running his railroad. Often the methods are as messy as they are expedient!"

JLA: NEW FRONTIER

Heroes just aren't what they used to be—but Darwyn Cooke is out to change that.

"We've seen enough heroes being brought down to this human level of weakness and questionable moral behavior," explained the writer/artist of DC's six-issue Prestige Format *New Frontier*. "With the Justice League, these are the seven or eight people in the world who've got the moral compass to do the right thing instead of grabbing the bushel of money."

Projected for late 2003/early 2004, *New Frontier* examines the lives of the original Justice League members, starting with Barry Allen's encounter with lightning in 1955 and leading to the League's formation in 1960. The story focuses on Hal Jordan (**pictured**), but many classic characters appear—including the Challengers of the Unknown, the Suicide Squad, Martian Manhunter, Flash, Wonder Woman, Superman and Batman.

WHAT'S UP WITH 'ORIGIN 2?'

WE WANNA SEE IT SO BUNNY UP AND MAKE IT

Those who rewrite history are destined to repeat it.

At least, that's the theory behind a sequel to *Origin*, the much-hyped unveiling of Wolverine's past that spearheaded the origin craze. As one of the top-selling books of 2001, it's almost a no-brainer that Marvel will eventually do a follow-up.

But don't hold your breath. No official decision on the fate of *Origin 2* has been made, and even the original creative team has no idea if and when the project could get off the ground.

"That's not really prominent right now," confirmed writer Paul Jenkins. "We really haven't talked that much about it. But there are a lot of things that need to be said about [James Howlett]. We left him decrepit and defunct and mindless, and the next story, no matter who does it, when it's done or how it's done, would be the next stage in his personal evolution, dealing with the events that happen to him that continue to shape him and make him the person he is."

"Honestly, I don't know when, or if, or how they're doing it," added artist Andy Kubert. "I've talked to Marvel about it, but that's about as far as it went. But if they ever wanted to do the next one, I'd love to draw it!"

In the meantime, Jenkins has his hands full working on the *last* Wolverine story, which will either be called *Wolverine: The End* or *Logan: The Last Story of Wolverine*. The latest in a series of "The End" stories published by Marvel, the six-issue series features art by Claudio Castellini (*Dark Horse Presents*) and is being envisioned as a bookend to *Origin*. Look for it towards the end of 2003. ■ RH

HULK: GRAY

"Not everything in the world is black & white," explained writer Jeph Loeb, who tackles the world's most powerful gamma-irradiated behemoth with collaborator Tim Sale. "There's shades of gray in every story, and in that gray is this monster."

The six-issue *Hulk: Gray* (release date TBA) captures the brief moment at the dawn of Hulk history before he turns into ol' Green Genes. "It all begins with the Gamma bomb," explained Loeb. "We'll look deeper into what the bomb was intended for, and how that had a hand in creating the Hulk."

As for the supporting cast? "We've got Rick Jones, the boy idiot," confirmed Loeb. "Betty Ross, the doomed lover. General Thunderbolt Ross, the giant ass. We also have a take on the relationship between Betty and her father—no, it's NOT sexual—that plays an important part." ■ RICHARD HO

A ROAD TRIP TO REMEMBER

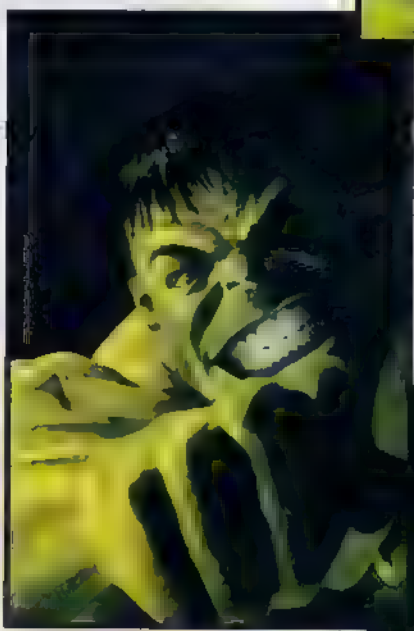
Bruce Banner hooks up with college girls in his 'Hulk: Nightmerica' travels

Fresh air, a clean mountain breeze and a campfire. Hell, the great outdoors sounds pretty good to Bruce Banner—that is, if he weren't running for his life.

This June, Banner and his alter ego, the Incredible Hulk, hit the road in writer Robin Laws and painter Brian Ashmore's new fully-painted, six-issue mini-series, *Hulk: Nightmerica*.

According to Laws (*Iron Man*), the series follows Banner and a young college co-ed named Chrissie Cutler who Banner meets on the road. But as Banner soon discovers, he's not the only one who has a secret.

"Banner finds a kindred spirit in a young college student who also finds herself a sort of fugitive as she attempts to reassemble the members of her long-lost surrogate family, all of whom are tied to the dark past of an installation nicknamed Nightmerica," explained Laws. "Other than Banner, we're actually meeting all-new characters. *Nightmerica* features a new adversary capable of going toe-to-toe with the Hulk."



While Laws wants to keep most of the mystery surrounding the new project top secret—especially the big new villain—the writer said the story will definitely focus on Banner's resourcefulness as both a scientist and a fugitive who's been on the run for years.

"I like to see a competent, sympathetic Banner who uses his brains and shows that he's learned things not only in the physics lab, but through his long experience as a fugitive," said Laws. "A good Hulk story touches on the themes of transformation, of the conflict between who we want to be and who we really are, of the Id vs. the Superego, of normalcy vs. monstrousness."

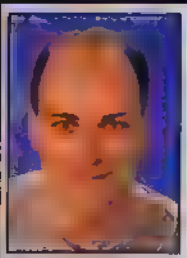
Long-time Hulk fan Laws admits one of the first characters he wanted to take on was when approached by Marvel was the seven-foot-tall monster.

"To me, the Hulk character has a tremendous psychological or archetypal resonance that offers incredible opportunities for both feeling and meaning," explained Laws. "There's something very pure and simple—and therefore both powerful and deeply challenging—about the character. When I was asked what my favorite character was, it only took me a few moments to blurt out, 'The Hulk!'" ■ **MIKE COTTON**

ROAD RULES It ain't spring break but Bruce Banner meets an interesting chick during his *Hulk: Nightmerica* travels.

(cont. Paul Schrodt)

A ROSS EXCLUSIVE



In honor of the release of the "Hulk" feature film, *Wizard* has teamed with Marvel Comics to get a little green at Wizard World East.

Wizard and the House of Ideas have produced an exclusive *Hulk: Nightmerica* #1 with a new, never-before-seen Alex Ross (*JLA: Liberty and Justice*) cover.

The variant cover will only be available to fans that purchase advance tickets to the May 30-June 1 show which will be held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, so order your passes now, fanboys!

And that's not the only "hulking out" that's going on at the show. In honor of the "Hulk" film's release on June 20, Wizard World East will be packed with former *Hulk* creators, Hulk exhibits and super-rare Hulk collectibles.

Also look for Guest of Honor Alex Ross popping in and out of the show, as well as top comic book talent such as Alex Maleev (*Daredevil*), Phil Jimenez (*New X-Men*), Andy Kubert (*1602*), Adam Kubert (*Ultimate X-Men*) and John Cassaday (*Captain America*).

Tickets for the show ($20 for one day, $40 for a three-day pass) can be purchased online at **www.wizarduniverse.com**.

GET YER TICKETS NOW

THE BUZZBIN

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE COMICS INDUSTRY

COSTUME PARTY According to insiders at Marvel, fans of the X-Men's classic costumes may get their wish this fall as the House of Ideas plans to put the X-teams back in their classic gear before year's end.

CRAVING ITALIAN The next crop of up-and-coming artists may hail from Italy, the land of pasta and girls with mustaches. An assortment of Marvel and DC reps recently went to Italy to do some scouting, and were so impressed with the talent that one editor went as far as to say, "I'm contacting 10 guys for work, and if I only get two working here, I'll be happy."

'FILTH'-Y X-STATIX? Marvel sources indicate Grant Morrison may write an issue of *X-Statix*, which could develop into a two-issue storyarc. No mention on whether Elvis monkeys (like those seen in Morrison's Vertigo series *The Filth*) would appear as major villains.

YOUNGBLOOD WATCH While the race continues to see which ultra-late project hits stands first–the year-late *Image 10th Anniversary* hardcover or Mark Millar/Rob Liefeld's *Youngblood: Bloodsport*–Liefeld inched closer to the finish line with a *Bloodsport* ashcan at the Orlando MegaCon.

100 BATARANGS DC wouldn't confirm the rumor, but the *100 Bullets* team of Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso is reportedly working on a Batman project that may serve as a break between Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's "Hush" storyarc and the start of their next scheduled six-issue run.

TALENT SCOUT Upcoming *Teen Titans* writer Geoff Johns was so impressed by "*Wizard* Cover Contest" winner Michael Wilson (*Wizard* #139's Venom cover) that he contacted the rookie sensation. Don't be surprised to see Wilson on a fill-in issue of *Teen Titans* or another Johns project in the near future.

SNAKE IN THE GRASS Fans of the original "G.I. Joe" cartoon will be treated to the return of one of the most dastardly villains in Joe history in an upcoming issue of the Image/Devil's Due *G.I. Joe* comic book, targeted for September. Can anyone say...Serpentor?

DANGER GIRL, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" fanatic J. Scott Campbell is mourning the end of the popular show–but he can't be *too* sad, since "Danger Girl" is being considered as a possible replacement for UPN's vampire-busting hit. Though "Danger Girl" production is in holding pattern, the pilot script is complete, and producers are eyeing a possible mid-season debut this fall. In the meantime, Campbell is busy working on a creator-owned book as well as a toy line he designed called "Girls and Monsters."

ENDING IT ALL Up next in Marvel's series of "The End" books (following *Hulk: The End*, *Marvel Universe: The End* and Paul Jenkins' upcoming *Wolverine: The End*)? A *Fantastic Four: The End* project, by Stan Lee and John Romita, Jr. Production is moving slowly because of Romita's hectic *Amazing Spider-Man* schedule, so no release date is set.

BILL OF SALE Billy Tucci is itching to get away from the administrative duties of running Crusade and jump back into drawing. To that end, the June release of his *Shi: Hot Target* one-shot will lead directly into a brand new mini-series drawn by the man himself–and word is the series could be published through Dark Horse

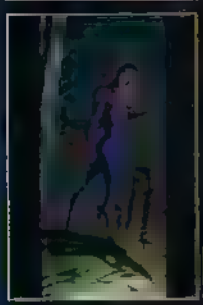
HOT READS

5 books we can't wait to pick up

Every month at *Wizard*, our editors read through hundreds of comic books. And like all fans, we get psyched about upcoming storylines and creative changes. Here are the five books that we're champing at the bit to read–and reasons why you should pick them up, too!

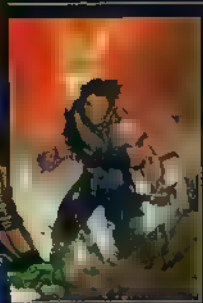
CRIMINAL MACABRE #1 The twisted geniuses behind *30 Days of Night* (writer Steve Niles and artist Ben Templesmith) exchange the barren Alaskan wastelands for the sunny California coast. Of course, there are vampires there, too, as seedy private investigator Cal McDonald investigates an eerie case. Aren't there enough bloodsuckers in Hollywood already?

JSA: ALL STARS #1 This series truly lives up to its name! With a talent roster that boasts Jeph Loeb, Tim Sale, Brian Azzarello, Eduardo Risso, Darwyn Cooke, John Cassaday, Geoff Johns, David Goyer, Howard Chaykin, Michael Lark, Tony Harris, James Robinson and even Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon, *JSA: All-Stars* could surely deliver one of the most jaw-dropping comic stories ever when the Golden Age heroes battle an enemy from their past.



ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #40 Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley have been heavy hitters when it comes to reinventing classic Spider-Man villains like Doctor Octopus and Venom, so we expect they'll knock this issue out of the park with the introduction of the first-ever original Ultimate Universe villain!

ARKHAM ASYLUM: LIVING HELL #1 We dig artist Ryan Sook's Mike Mignola-meets-Tim Sale pencils, and the painted covers by Eric Powell (*The Goon*) kick ass! This series is being pitched as a meeting of HBO's searing prison drama "Oz" and the DCU–and with Arkham's bizarre collection of psychopaths and madmen (like Joker, Riddler, Scarecrow, etc.), this story should be creepy and disturbing. Just don't drop the soap!

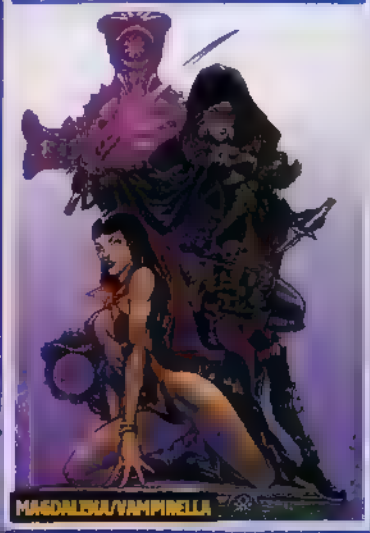


X-TREME X-MEN #25-#26 Longtime X-writer Chris Claremont finally dishes out the sequel to his classic X-Men graphic novel, *God Loves, Man Kills*, starting in May with these two issues. And with Salvador Larroca drawing his badass versions of the X-Men, this story should pack plenty of visual as well as nostalgic punch.

NEWSFLASHES

UPDATES AND RELEASES FROM AROUND THE INDUSTRY

TWO GIRLS AT ONCE Top Cow and Harris are teaming up on a pair of crossovers in June. Harris will release a *Vampirella/Witchblade* team-up, by Brian Wood (*Fight for Tomorrow*) and Steve Pugh (*Saint of Killers*), while Top Cow will publish a *Magdalena/Vampirella* crossover courtesy of David Wohl and Joe Benitez, which spins into July's *Magdalena* mini-series.



MAGDALENA/VAMPIRELLA

CODE 6 ALERT CrossGen has announced that Chuck Russell and Bob Gale, two Hollywood players involved in the publisher's in-development movie properties, will further expand their comic book horizons by writing original six-issue mini-series for the Code 6 imprint. Russell (director of "The Mask" and "Scorpion King" and upcoming director of "Way of the Rat") will write the sci-fi epic *Metal Storm* and Gale (screenwriter for the "Back to the Future" film trilogy and the upcoming "Meridian" CGI-animated feature) will write the action thriller *Illustrated Warriors*.

NEW BATGIRL IN TOWN *Batgirl* #40 will [illegible] collaborators Kelley Puckett and penciler Damion Scott. Taking their place will be indy veteran Dylan Horrocks (*Holy Crullers*) and newcomer Adrian Sibar.

KORE CURRICULUM After [illegible] in April, Devil's Due's new horror title *Kore* returns with monthly issues starting in June. The book is being touted as a dark, gothic thriller in the tradition of Chaos! Comics.

HULK OUT [illegible] the "Hulk" movie franchise, Marvel will release *The Incredible Hulk* #55 with a cover price of only 25 cents. Series writer Bruce Jones and artist Leandro Fernandez (*Queen & Country*) begin an entirely new storyarc with the issue featuring the return of Crusher Creel and the Absorbing Man.

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM Dreamwave's new original series *NecroWar* debuts in July. The sci-fi epic will feature stunning 100 percent digital art, painted from scratch in Adobe Photoshop by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

CHARACTER TO WATCH

DOOP

The most powerful character in the Marvel U.? According to *X-Statix* Editor Axel Alonso, it ain't Thor or Hulk anymore, it's the X-Statix's filmographer and booger-esque mascot, Doop–and he's got the empirical data to prove it.

"I think it's well known by now–as proven in the *Marvel Encyclopedia*–that Doop's power levels are off the charts," said Alonso. "And we have every intention on proving that in the coming months."

The fun starts off with May's *Wolverine/Doop*, a two-part mini-series by *X-Statix* scribe Pete Milligan with art by Darwyn Cooke (*JLA: New Frontier*). What Alonso describes as "a buddy flick and, quite possibly, the most important team-up...ever," *Wolverine/Doop* finds the two mighty mutants on a "Maltese Falcon"-type adventure complete with seedy villains, a beautiful femme fatale and possibly a brawl to end them all.

"*Wolverine/Doop* just might set the stage for the two to fight," hinted Alonso. "I think most of us have wondered how Wolverine's claws would fare against Doop's hide."

As far as Doop taking on other Marvel heavy hitters, Alonso hinted, "Nothing's concrete yet, but chances are good that fans will learn who's the strongest one there is–Hulk or Doop–in the coming months."

HEAT INDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard*, and here's some cool things we read and saw this month.

HELLBOY: WEIRD TALES #1 (Dark Horse) Prior to reading this all-new Hellboy anthology from Dark Horse, we assumed anyone drawing or writing the "Beast of the Apocalypse" other than creator Mike Mignola was sacrilegious. However, after seeing the amazing renditions by the likes of John Cassaday, Fabian Nicieza and Andi Watson, consider us converted!

ULTIMATES #9 (Marvel) We've said it before and we'll say it again–when it comes to bad-asses, none come tougher than Ultimate Captain America! After confronting wife-beater Hank Pym in a seedy Chicago bar, Cap orders Hank to, "Change size," and "Give him something to hit," and when Pym obliges, Cap not only hits him with fists, but a few tons of iron piping as well!

SPIDER-MAN: BLUE #6 (Marvel) It took awhile, but we were finally treated to the conclusion of this nostalgic tale. Tim Sale draws a smokin' Gwen Stacy...and his MJ ain't half bad, either! And the touching ending had us feeling, well, blue.

JACK STAFF #1 (Image) Indy star Paul Grist's book about British superheroes combines elements of all of our favorite comic book genres, from the gritty cop drama of Detective Inspector Maveryk (think British *GCPD*) to the *Planetary*-esque trio of paranormal investigators called Q.

BLOOD AND WATER #1 (Vertigo/DC) Judd Winick explores a new twist on the vampire genre with this rollicking yet disturbing tale of a young man stricken with a debilitating and humiliating fatal disease who becomes a vampire to cure his ills. Of course, the old saying, "Be careful what you wish for," comes back to...bite him on the ass, so to speak!

VIDEO VISIONS

NEW BIRDS ON THE BLOCK

PLAY AT PLAY

ELVES AT DC

LET IT BLEED

A NEW DAWN BREAKS

Linsner returns with six-issue mini-series

It's been four long years since Joseph Michael Linsner's Dawn last graced comic shelves with her divine presence but the sultry modern-day Earth goddess returns in June when Linsner revisits Dawn with the new six-issue, bimonthly series from Image, *Dawn: Three Tiers*.

Why the long hiatus? "I was waiting for it to feel right," explained Linsner. "It's like finding the right inspiration for a song, you can't force it. It has to come out on it's own."

The new series, which will once again be written, penciled, inked and painted by Linsner, picks up where the first series, *Cry For Dawn*, left off. The spotlight comes off of Dawn this time around, and readers who missed the demon-slaying angel-killer Damian Ashoka in the second Dawn series (*Return of the Goddess*) will be pleased to see him taking a major role in *Three Tiers*.

"The story is about Damian's adventures in Europe," said Linsner. "He keeps meeting women who remind him of Dawn without meeting Dawn herself. The essence of Dawn leads him into one crazy adventure after another."

Never one to disappoint, Linsner assured that there will be "lots of beautiful women and lots of violent swordfights." But will there be Dawn? Of course, it wouldn't be *Dawn* without her! She'll be communicating with Damian much the same way she does with fanboys: through dreams.

For this new installment, Linsner is going back to basics.

"The first issue opens with a recap of who Damian is and who Dawn is," said Linsner. "I'm doing my best to open it up. It should be accessible to new readers and should be a good jumping on point." ■ TODD CASEY

SMOKE SIGNALS

Eagle-eyed fans may have already noticed, but more and more Marvel Comics are featuring anti-smoking "Truth" ads on billboards and signs in the background of panels of such titles as *Black Panther*, *Spider-Girl*, *Thor* and *Agent X*.

And it's no accident, according to Marvel President Bill Jemas. Jemas and Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, both non-smokers, felt it was important to support the Truth campaign, which is geared to stopping young adults from smoking.

"The people at Truth (www.TheTruth.com) actually suggested it to us," said Jemas. "Both [Joe] Quesada and I thought it was a great idea. We did a very friendly handshake deal, that if we could work anti-smoking billboards easily into the content–leaving it, for the most part up to the creative teams–we'd do our best to do it. Obviously, we think it's a good cause." ■ MC

BIG MACK ATTACK

Kabuki creator David Mack hits over a dozen of the world's top comic book conventions...now hear his worst stories

If you're looking for David Mack, don't try his house.

The *Kabuki* creator and upcoming *Daredevil* writer and artist logs thousands of miles on buses, trains, planes and in his own car every year, traveling to comic book conventions as close as his home state of Kentucky and as far away as France and Australia.

But Mack does it for one reason–to meet the fans...oh, and those frequent flyer miles don't hurt either.

So how many miles do you log a year?

I don't know how many miles I log, but I know I've got a lot. I've got a lot of sky miles–like over 200,000 I think.

You're a sensitive fella–do you pack like a girl or a guy?

I'd have to say I pack like a guy. I have it down to a science. The personal stuff I take is very small. If I'm going to be gone for two days, I just take two sets of clothes and that's it. Then I take artwork and books. Ninety-nine percent of my luggage is just books. I'll have a whole suitcase just of books I bring. And I bring my girlfriend, she's the most important luggage I bring. [*Chuckles*]

So, what's a must-have for you at cons? Any lucky charms?

[*Pauses*] My girlfriend, of course. [***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Mack's girlfriend was in the room during this interview.*] And the readers, the fans–that's why I go. [***EDITOR'S NOTE:** None of Mack's fans were in the room during this interview.*]

Any bad hotel experiences?

There were a few hotel problems. Once, whenever some other room would flush their toilet, it would come out our sink. It flooded the room. They moved us to another room.

Smart move. Ever party all night, like a rock star?

There was one time at the Pittsburgh Convention, maybe '98. I was working on *Kabuki: Mask of the Mei*, and I was working with a few other artists–it had to go to print the following week. There was one artist who didn't come through. So at the show a couple other artists had their own hotel room and were going to help me finish the story from start to finish. Every night after the con, we'd go back to their hotel room and work all night. One person would pencil a panel, one guy would pencil another panel. As soon as I get back, I sent it off to the printer.

Those pigs at the airport ever hassle you, brother?

What? I had a luggage problem once. You know how you get your luggage back with a little note on it saying they went through it? Well, one time I got my luggage back and then realized it had a lock on it. Only, I never put a lock on it. And we had no key for it. It was this huge lock, we had to go out and buy a pair of wire cutters to get it off.

MACK'S DAREDEVIL #16

So you bring any freaky-deaky stuff to the cons?

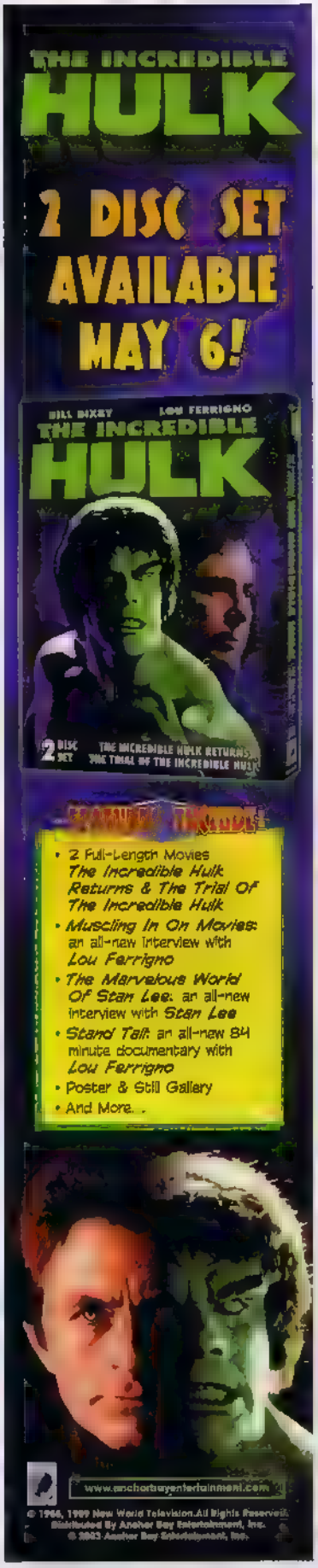
Well, the oddest thing I bring to a con would be...? Oh, again, it's my girlfriend. [*Laughs*]

That is freaky-deaky. So, what should the fans bring?

They gotta bring the books and if you want something drawn, bring a sketchbook or paper. Oh, my girlfriend says bring some deodorant. Yeah, strike my first one. Sometimes you realize when the lines are thick in Chicago, "Hey, forget the paper–just bring deodorant."

MC

Mack: Pencil Kabuki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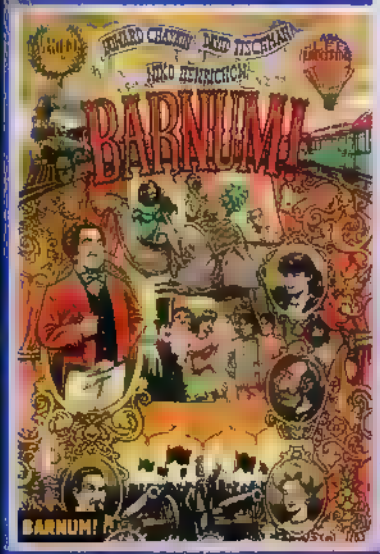
game, Dark Horse teams up the writers of the game [illegible] penciler Cliff Richards for a one-shot adaptation [illegible] barriers between alternate realities have begun to erode around Sunnydale, and Buffy and the gang face nightmare versions of friends and allies, as well as enemies thought long dead.

STEP RIGHT UP! [illegible] all-new DC/Vertigo hardcover one-shot *Barnum!* [illegible] *Barnum!* shows the famous circus ringmaster living a double life, one in the circus and one as a special agent for the U.S. government who must take down an evil scientist set on [illegible] team of Howard Chaykin and David [illegible] Ships May 28.



BAM, CRACKLE, VERTIGO POP! [illegible] international sex scandal. It all happens in the *Vertigo Pop!: Bangkok* [illegible] Written by Jonathan [illegible] mini-series hits stands May [illegible]

COOL TO THE CORPS [illegible] demons and other nasties that threaten Earth [illegible]

COMPANY TO WATCH

HUMANOIDS PUBLISHING

Stan Lee's made the move. So have Terry Dodson, John Cassaday and a crop of top European creators.

No, these artists and writers aren't packing up and leaving; they've all made the move to work with Humanoids Publishing. But just who is this new player on the block, and why are they attracting top U.S. and European talent?

Founded by a group of European artists including the renowned French painter Moebius in 1974, Humanoids has long ranked as a premiere European publisher with *Metal Hurlant* and the sci-fi classic *Metabarons*. But now, Humanoids is making a push into the U.S. market and stateside creators are jumping on board.

Debuting next year will be *I Am Legion*, a WWII battlefield horror story written by French writer Fabien Nury with art by *Captain America* artist extraordinaire Cassaday.

Meanwhile, Dodson (*Spider-Man/Black Cat: The Evil that Men Do*) offers up the turn-of-the-century action-tale, *Carolina*, a graphic novel where he teams up with Frenchman Denis-Pierre Filippi. Plus, Humanoids recently acquired the rights to Stan Lee's Pamela Anderson vehicle, *Stripperella*, and an adaptation written by Lee with art by newcomer Harry Kane is currently in the works. To learn more, visit www.humanoids-publishing.com.

THE FINAL FABLE?

Willingham and Russell offer up prequel tale with one-shot

It looks like Bill Willingham's finally reached his limit with fairy tale characters to mess with in *Fables*. Now, he's setting his sights on historical events.

"I've been reading up a lot lately on the Alamo," said Willingham. "So now I want to do an Alamo story."

Fans will see what Willingham's alluding to this September with the one-shot, Prestige Format *Fables: The Last Castle*. Written by Willingham with art by renowned *Sandman* penciler P. Craig Russell, *The Last Castle* serves as a prequel to the runaway Vertigo hit series, showing for the first time the events that led to the Fables' exile from their fairy tale homelands and into bustling New York City.

"It's the story of the last group of Fables to make it out of their homelands as the Adversary was invading," explained Willingham. "They're trapped in a castle, which is based on an obscure fairy tale called *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, which has this really remote castle filled with goblins and witches. So they're holed up inside this as the Adversary's vast armies are surrounding and laying siege to it."

Despite the fact that the evil, as-yet-unseen antagonist—the Adversary—plays a major part in the one-shot, Willingham is quick to mention that fans will have to wait a little longer to see what the villain looks like. However, expect to see several new Fableland characters make their debut—but that doesn't necessarily mean they'll survive. ■ CASEY SELLS

G.I. JOE, TRANSFORMERS COLLIDE IN CROSSOVER

Ney Reiber, Jae Lee team up for Dreamwave's '80s dream tale set in World War II

Who better to bring the ultimate fanboy crossover to life than a pair of fanboys?

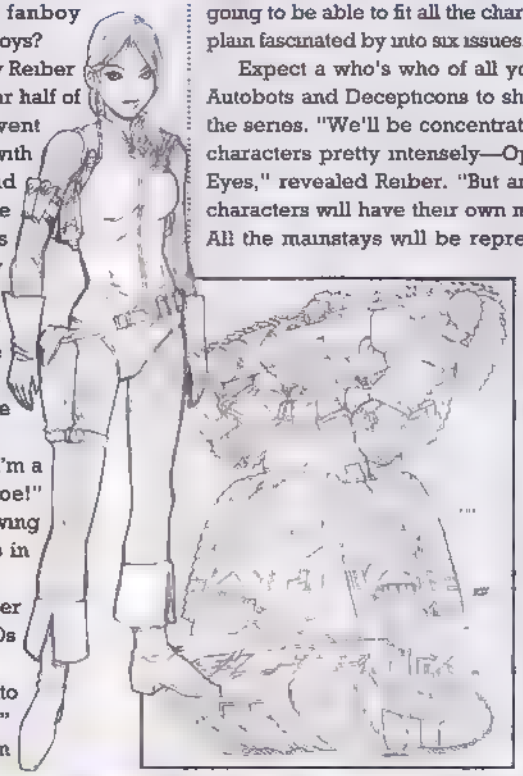
Dreamwave has announced John Ney Reiber and Jae Lee as the creative team for their half of the *G.I. Joe/Transformers* crossover event (Devil's Due's mini-series hits in June with the creative team of Josh Blaylock and Mike Miller). The six-issue Dreamwave mini-series debuts in August and boasts an alternate-reality World War II story in which Cobra forms a deadly Shadow Axis with the Decepticons, prompting G.I. Joe to awaken and recruit the Autobots in their fight against evil.

For Reiber and Lee, working on the project was a fanboy's dream come true.

"I'm a child of the '80s, so of course I'm a big fan of the Transformers and G.I. Joe!" gushed Lee. "I was a latchkey kid growing up, so I would spend a solid two hours in front of the TV watching cartoons."

Former *Captain America* scribe Reiber isn't afraid to admit his love for the '80s icons, either.

"Which is almost a handicap, going into a monster crossover project like this!" lamented Reiber. "There's no way that I'm going to be able to fit all the characters I'm intrigued or just plain fascinated by into six issues."



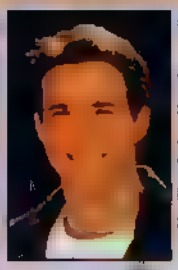
Expect a who's who of all your favorite Joes, Cobras, Autobots and Decepticons to show up over the course of the series. "We'll be concentrating on two key viewpoint characters pretty intensely—Optimus Prime and Snake-Eyes," revealed Reiber. "But an insane number of other characters will have their own moments in the spotlight." All the mainstays will be represented, including Hawk, Duke, Lady Jaye, Bumblebee, Megatron, Starscream, Cobra Commander and Storm Shadow, just to name a few.

"I love Snake-Eyes," added Lee. "Grimlock's awesome. Destro boasts one of the coolest designs. I can't wait to kill them all."

Bottom line? Fans of G.I. Joe and Transformers alike are in for a heckuva ride. "Fasten your seat belt," advised Reiber. "I've got mine on." ■ RM

ROCKTHEVOTE

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION!

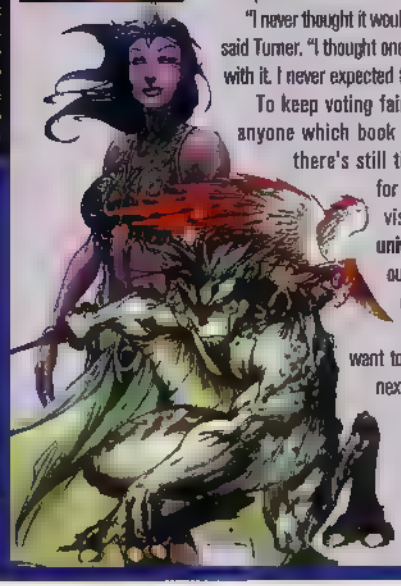


Comic fans have thrown Mike Turner for a loop.

After thousands of fans have weighed in whether the *Fathom* creator's next project would be *Ekos*–the story of an alien invasion on a distant world–with *Avengers* writer Geoff Johns or *Dragonfly: Soulfire*–the story of a possible future and the nature of magicks–with *Batman* scribe Jeph Loeb, the result remains too close to call. In fact, only about 200 votes separate the two titles.

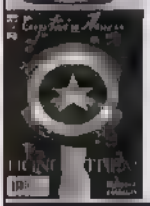
"I never thought it would be this tight a race," said Turner. "I thought one title would run away with it. I never expected this."

To keep voting fair, Turner won't tell anyone which book is in the lead, but there's still time to cast a vote for your favorite. Just visit **www.wizarduniverse.com** and check out a six-page preview of each series–then vote for the one you want to see Turner work on next. ■ MK



Turner, Ally Wardell

BEST COMICS & HOBBY CENTER



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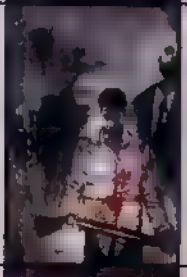
VISA

SCARE TACTICS

It's shaping up to be a frightfully good summer, thanks to a host of horror titles by your favorite scare-meisters. Here's a breakdown of a sinister six-pack that'll surely keep you up nights...if you can dare to read them alone! Bwahahahhahahahahahaaaha! Ha! (Evil laughing will now cease!)

TITLE		CREATORS	PREMISE	BOTTOM LINE
Dark Days (IDW) Issue #1 of this six-issue mini-series ships in June		Steve Niles (writer), Ben Templesmith (artist)	In this sequel to the 2002 surprise smash *30 Days of Night*, Stella Olemaun, the deputy who survived the bloody vampire invasion of her small Alaskan town, dedicates herself to eliminating the bloodsucking scourge and alerting the world to their secret existence.	Templesmith's disturbing imagery combined with Niles' blood-curdling premise will surely drain the blood from your body and leave you tossing and turning all night.
Criminal Macabre (Dark Horse) Issue #1 of this five-issue mini-series ships May 14		Steve Niles (w), Ben Templesmith (a)	A seedy private investigator named Cal McDonald–both a boozer and a junkie–is the only defense against a horde of elite vampires and werewolves who want to take a bite out of the Hollywood nightlife.	Niles and Templesmith stay up late concocting these nightmarish scenarios to keep readers thrilled and chilled. Right now, they're the undisputed kings of fright.
Vampi: Vicious (Anarchy/Harris) Issue #1 of this ongoing series ships in July		Sean McKeever (w), Omar Dogan (a)	The high-flying vampire vixen takes on a different kind of mission in this new series; she's becoming a vigilante of sorts, targeting corporations and big businessmen in a future world where science uses humans as guinea pigs–much like Vampi herself!	As the title implies, Vampi's going to viciously pursue and punish those offenders of humanity. ..and we're guessing that she'll enjoy sinking her teeth into this new mission of hers.
Doc Frankenstein: Unholy Nemesis (TBD) The creators are searching for a publisher for this four-issue mini-series, which hopefully will launch later in 2003		Steve Skroce (w & a), Geof Darrow (w)	Frankenstein's monster survives his icy doom from the Mary Shelley novel and wanders the world accumulating all sorts of knowledge. A century later, he's a protector of the dispossessed and a secret force of influence on world events–until the Frankenstein family outs his existence, forcing him to go on the run again!	Skroce (**page 60**) and Darrow have cobbled together an impressive premise for this monstrous romp, but they've gotta finish up work on the "Matrix" sequels and the Will Smith film "I, Robot" and find a publisher before this undead mini can live again.
Scarlet Traces (Dark Horse) This 80-page softcover ships Aug. 20		Ian Edginton (w), D'Israeli (a)	Combining a horrific "What if?" premise with a grizzly murder mystery, *Scarlet Traces* takes place a decade after Mars attempted to take over the Earth (a la "War of the Worlds"). The victorious Brits use Martian technology to create a benign dictatorship. But when bodies of young women drained of blood wash up in the Thames River, Capt. Robert Autumn investigates the murders, which have ties to the Martian influence.	A murder mystery set in Victorian England with Martians at the heart of it? This thing's got Hollywood written all over. A little murder, a little mayhem and loads of Victorian adventure should make for a spine-tingling read.
The Goon (Dark Horse) Issue #1 of this bimonthly series goes on sale in June 18		Eric Powell (w & a)	The Goon, a hard-boiled paranormal investigator, cracks skulls–and cracks wise–on any and all comers especially demons, monsters and other creatures of unknown origin with a taste for human flesh. His spastic sidekick Franky provides comedy relief.	If you wanna splatter your scares with a solid dose of laughter, *The Goon* will be right up your alley. This mixture of Lovecraftian pulp horror and wild slapstick comedy will deliver a devastating 1-2 combination of laughs and chills.

LEX VS. X

"Smallville"'s Lex Luthor, "X2"'s Professor X. Both live in Hollywood and have shiny heads. Let's see what else they have in common.

His doctor girlfriend has a great set of legs.

Will grow up to be President of the United States

His sworn enemy is his best friend, wears red cape

Every episode, someone walks into his mansion to cause trouble

Keeps his friends close and his enemies closer

His rep makes it tough to make friends

Despite having a doctorate, lacks the use of his legs

Will grow older as his powerful mind reaches a feeble state

His best friend is his sworn enemy, wears purple cape

Feels sorry for anyone who comes to his mansion looking for trouble

Keeps his friends close and his enemies in plastic prisons

Often makes a mess in his Depends

...so, who's cooler? While Lex knows Kristin Kreuk and one half of the Dolce Boys, Chuck Xavier hangs out with a naked Becky Stames and gets to wear a cool helmet.

THE WINNER: The Bald Guy

THEY SAID IT

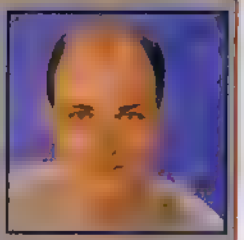
"I'm going to be wrapping up most of the ABC line—at least my part of it—then **I'm going to be going into semi-retirement** from the comics industry. I just want to try some other things and not have deadlines hanging over me all the time."

–Alan Moore

For more on Moore's comics' "retirement," see *Wizard* #142

5 QUESTIONS WITH...

ALEX ROSS



The fan-favorite master of "realistic" superheroes, Alex Ross teams up with writer Paul Dini to produce *JLA: Liberty and Justice* (page 80), a 90-page oversized comic hitting in November that stars the Silver Age version of the original Justice League of America. According to Ross, "It takes the classic Justice League and uses them in a way that seems plausible, like they would if they were operating in the real world. The adventure they're in involves an alien threat and is handled as utterly realistically as possible." We caught up with Ross–who also serves as Guest of Honor at Wizard World East in Philadelphia May 30-June 1–to pick his brain on a number of topics.

George Perez claims to hate drawing cars, especially moving cars. What do you hate?

I'm not a big lover of the mechanical. I've done a lot of buildings in my career–it adds to the grandeur of believing in a scene–but I really have no love for doing technical equipment. I have no appreciation for guns. I have no understanding of them, even having the reference to draw them. If I could draw comics where nobody ever had a gun, I'd be in good shape. It's why I like superheroes–there's no guns generally.

With Battle of the Planets, are you "The Man" at Top Cow now?

If I am, I am by default. Sadly, they can't rely enough upon me to be the "The Man." I have joked with [Top Cow Editor-in-Chief] Jim McLauchlin about it. I told him I should be his new Mike Turner. I kid him about that. Should anything go sour with my deals at DC, I know I could turn around and create whatever thing I want at Top Cow.

What [illegible] do you read regularly?

I try and keep up with the Alan Moore stuff. I've enjoyed the sh– out of Brian Bendis' *Daredevil*. Alex Maleev's art is...it's just unreal how cool it is. I love *The Ultimates*. I don't necessarily like the "Hey, let's begin it all again because that's the way to heal the comic book problem" mentality, but I can't say they're not doing it well. As much as I love the story, it's really all over the minute Bryan Hitch throws in the towel. You can't replace the level of graphic he's bringing to that book–it's defined by how much work he's putting into it. When I see his pages with building after building, meticulously drawn, and backgrounds that seem to go on forever, it makes me feel like I'm not working hard enough.

Who's the hardest character to paint?

In some ways, it's Spider-Man. With Spider-Man, I'm trying to make it look like he's really there and, because of those black webs, he can come off looking like a two-dimensional drawing. He's got an ink outline on him, essentially; ink lines on his body. Taking those ink lines and making them look like they're existing in three-dimensional space has always been a very delicate procedure.

Easiest character?

The Invisible Girl. [*Laughs*]

Ross: Paul Schrade; Ramonkeone: MW; Simonetti Fox, Monroe: Bob Martin

DIXON OPTS FOR BIG BUCS

Writer sets sail for uncharted territory with new CrossGen pirate adventure 'El Cazador'

Chuck Dixon is heading for uncharted waters.

The CrossGen scribe is used to writing about barbarians, martial arts, Atlanteans and intergalactic empires. But this fall, Dixon teams with former *Crux* partner Steve Epting to target the high seas with *El Cazador*, a brand-new adventure that thrusts pirates back into the comic spotlight.

"It's been a while since we've seen a good pirate comic!" laughed Dixon. "The last good one I can remember is the 'story within a story' in *Watchmen*. I'm a huge fan of the whole pirate genre—for some reason these sea-going criminals capture the imagination. I think it's the allure of the outlaw combined with sailing around causing trouble! You add up the long history of tall tales and legends, and it's ripe territory for stories."

El Cazador follows the adventures of Cinzia Luiz-Hidalgo, the tough-as-nails daughter of a Spanish don who turns to piracy to save her kidnapped family. The story will take Cinzia all over the seven seas, from the Caribbean to the African Coast—all onboard the pirate ship El Cazador.

"That's Spanish for 'The Hunter,'" explained Dixon. "The story is set in the Golden Age of Piracy, in the late 1600s. We'll have mutinies, marooning, cannibals and sea battles, along with the colorful crew members of each ship. And complicating things for Cinzia will be an English privateer and pirate hunter named Redhand Harry. He's going to be a thorn in Cinzia's side for many issues to come."

YO NO'S You don't need to have testicles to be in the pirate club.

Beyond that, Dixon is hording story details like buried treasure. "I don't want to reveal too much!" said the scribe. "But suffice it to say that it's all high adventure action, and as true to reality as we can make it." Which means readers should toss all pirate stereotypes overboard right now. "There will be no parrots," vowed Dixon. "No walking the plank. No eye patches. The characters will never say 'argh, matey!' or 'shiver me timbers' or other tired crap that pirates never actually did. All the pirate clichés will be avoided. What we *will* see is careening, Lagrange, the Spanish Inquisition and other fun stuff from the bad old days of the buccaneers."

And you can forget about the monkeys. "No monkeys!" laughed Dixon. "I've got enough monkeys on my hands over in *Way of the Rat*!" ■ RH

NILES GETS DRESSED TO THE NINES

'30 Days of Night' writer takes over three-issue 'Aphrodite IX' mini-series for Top Cow

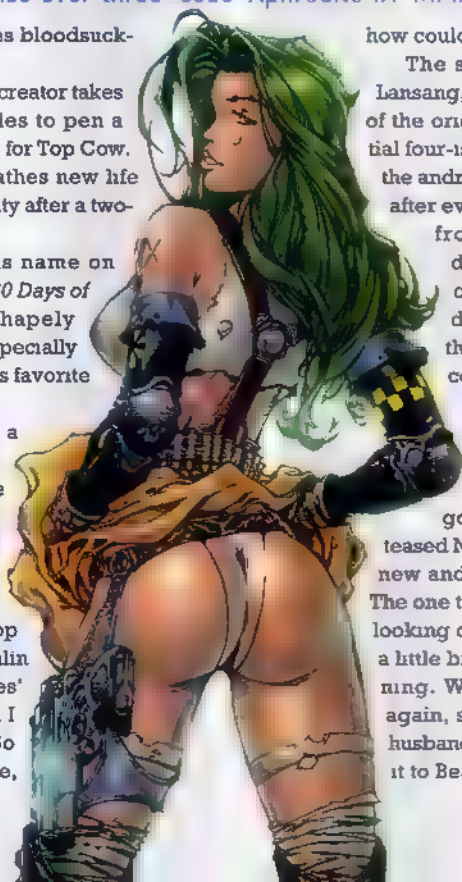
This August, Steve Niles trades bloodsuckers for bombshells.

The acclaimed *30 Days of Night* creator takes a break from horror-themed tales to pen a brand-new *Aphrodite IX* adventure for Top Cow. The three-issue mini-series breathes new life into the green-haired robotic beauty after a two-year absence.

For the writer who made his name on spooky titles like *Hellspawn* and *30 Days of Night*, switching gears to the shapely assassin was surprisingly easy—especially since she reminds him of one of his favorite horror characters.

"I'd compare *Aphrodite IX* to a Frankenstein story," explained Niles. "This woman is given a life with no history and no past, and basically forced to define herself. Is she a ruthless killer, or is there much more to her?"

Of course, it didn't hurt that Top Cow Editor-in-Chief Jim McLauchlin was able to play on another of Niles' soft spots. "He knows how much I love robots!" laughed Niles. "So when he pitched this project at me, how could I say no?"



The series will be drawn by Clarence Lansang, the artist who drew issues #3 and #4 of the original *Aphrodite IX* series. In that initial four-issue run, readers were introduced to the android assassin, whose memory is wiped after every programmed hit, preventing her from remembering her murderous deeds. Niles plans on continuing the character's personal journey of self-discovery, as she struggles to uncover the mysteries of her creation and discover just who is pulling her strings.

As for the dastardly menace that Aphrodite IX will face in this story? Niles is keeping that top secret. "I *think* I have a nice original take that's going to really surprise everybody," teased Niles. "I wanted to create something all new and different that wasn't just a rehash. The one thing I can say is that readers who are looking only for sexy images are going to be a little bit disappointed, at least at the beginning. When we pick up Aphrodite's story again, she's a housewife with a baby and a husband living in the suburbs in a very 'Leave it to Beaver' world!" ■ RH

PROS AND CONS!

Top 10 Reasons why you have to hit Wizard World East

1 "WHAT?!?"
WWE superstar and multi-time champion Stone Cold Steve Austin will be on hand to meet fans, sign autographs and put people through the Spanish Announcer's table.

2 MACK ON ALLISON!
Meet "Smallville"'s Allison Mack ("Chloe"), get things with an "S" on them signed and ask her if she knows Clark Kent is really Superman.

3 ALEX ROSS: KING OF MEN
Wizard World Guest of Honor Alex Ross will be meetin' and greetin' fans, signin' copies of *Battle of the Planets*, talking about his upcoming *JLA: Liberty and Justice* and all the other cool stuff he's done. Meet him and feel worse about your own artistic skill.

4 PUNCH SPIDER-MAN
No, Tobey Maguire won't be there, but WizKids' HeroClix World Championship will be. Grab your favorite Marvel characters and be the last superhero left standing in your bid for the gold.

5 NO PUNCH BATMAN!
Meet Wizard World Special Guest Jim Lee, artist on the #1 book in the entire space-time continuum, *Batman*! Meet Lee and Bat-writer Jeph Loeb, grab autographs and become a better person.

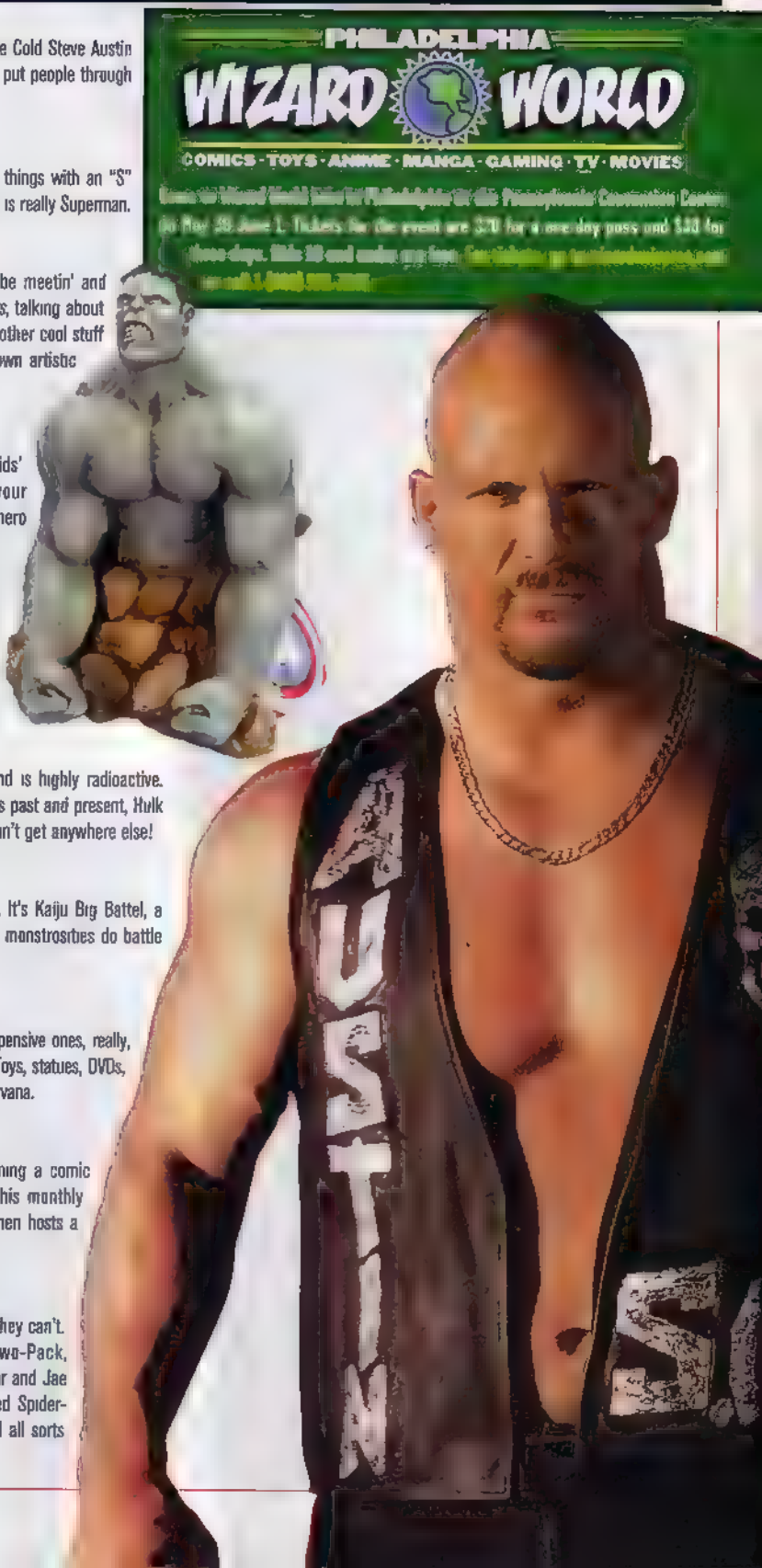
6 HULKAMANIA!
He's big, rips his shirt when he gets angry and is highly radioactive. Come celebrate the "Hulk" movie with Hulk creators past and present, Hulk exhibits and special merchandise (**pictured**) you can't get anywhere else!

7 EVIL ROBOTS!
And giant monsters. And giant robot monsters. It's Kaiju Big Battel, a Japanese monster movie come to life as life-sized monstrosities do battle inside a wrestling ring! Bring a mop.

8 COMIC BOOKS, DAMMIT!
They'll be millions of 'em there. Really, really expensive ones, really, really cheap ones and all sorts of other crazy stuff. Toys, statues, DVDs, posters, hot dogs, T-shirts, imported stuff...it'll be nirvana.

9 DRAW COMICS!
Take your first steps down the road of becoming a comic book artist as the legendary Joe Kubert begins his monthly "Basic Training" art lessons in *Wizard* magazine, then hosts a session at Wizard School.

10 EXCLUSIVE STUFF
Make your friends feel bad by getting stuff they can't. Palisades Toys' Tuxedo Bunson and Beaker Two-Pack, Dynamic Forces' *Witchblade* one-shot by Mark Millar and Jae Lee, Artist Proof Editions of the Alex Ross-designed Spider-Man and Captain America Full-Size head busts and all sorts of other stuff you can only get here!



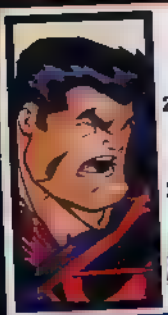
LAST MAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

SUPERMAN VS. THOR

THE COMBATANTS

TALE OF THE TAPE



6'3"	HEIGHT	6'6"
226 lbs	WEIGHT	640 lbs
75"	REACH	78"
Flying dog	PET	Flying goats
On the outside	WEARS UNDERWEAR	Never

origins... Norse god of thunder and prince of the fabled land of Asgard, Thor wields his enchanted hammer Mjolnir in order to protect his adopted homeland of Earth from the forces of evil!

Strange visitor from another planet with powers far beyond those of mortal men, Superman fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American way!

the battle... To rid himself of his do-gooder stepbrother, Loki casts a spell that transports Thor from the golden streets of Asgard to the busy streets of Metropolis! The bewildered thunder god—his perceptions altered by Loki's spell—attacks pedestrians thinking them to be trolls. Flying overhead, Superman sees Thor rampaging through his city, and flies straight into Thor at Mach 3, slamming the Avenger through the street and into the sewers below. Thor hurls Mjolnir at Superman who easily dodges it with his super-speed. The Man of Steel closes in on the blond powerhouse and pounds away at him in a flurry of super-fast, super-strong blows—thus playing right into Thor's hands. Enchanted by Odin to always return to its owner's hand, Mjolnir returns for Thor's next volly. Dazed, Superman unleashes his heat vision, which Thor deflects with his hammer, but is distracted enough for Superman to fly in close and grapple with the thunder god in midair. Realizing he can't overcome his opponent's superior speed, the Asgardian calls down a massive lightning strike on them both. The lightning injures Thor, but being magical in nature, it pierces the Man of Steel's invulnerability and puts him down for the count. Standing over the comatose Superman, the bloody and battered Thor proclaims: "Thou wert truly a worthy opponent—for a mortal!"

This month's battle drawn by ED McGUINNESS

JMS

Writer J. Michael Straczynski ponders a final Spidey tale, an R-rated 'Supreme Power' and his love of Alan Moore

By Mike Cotton

How long do you see yourself staying on Amazing Spider-Man?

I'm blissfully happy to stay with the book for as long as [Marvel] will have me. I'm sure sooner or later I'll flame out or do something profoundly stupid, because everybody does, me in particular, because I'm kind of an idiot in some ways, but until that day comes, I'm just enjoying the hell out of it.

Supreme Power deals with mature themes. How far will you take the sex and violence?

It has its moments of dark humor, which I love, but it's a pretty serious book. I'm treating it as realistically as I can, asking what would happen if these sorts of people began showing up, taking it to a level of complexity I didn't have the chance (or, at that time, just to be honestly self-critical, the experience) to take it to in *Rising Stars*. I'm not big on gratuitous sex, language or violence. Where it makes sense, where it's real, I'll use it. Where it isn't, I won't.

You've talked about writing a Superman story. What's essential for a tale starring the Man of Steel?

I think one of the very best Superman stories ever written was Alan Moore's "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?" What made that book successful is that it really delved into the emotions and the dilemma of being Superman, what that power meant, what having that kind of power felt like. The book ran the gamut of really strong emotions, from courage to rage to grief. People want to feel something when they read a book, to care about what happens to the characters. I've heard any number of people, some of them at DC, saying that nothing much can be done with Superman because he's too powerful.

Why does Moore's story stand out for you?

Alan's approach puts the lie to that comment. Just because his skin is invulnerable doesn't mean his heart cannot be pierced by emotion. What I would do is take that core truth and build upon it. Writers have been taking his powers for granted; we all grew up knowing what his abilities are, and after a while, we stop really thinking about them. It just sorta is; it's an ability you use to deal with a plot point. But imagine for just a moment the reality of that situation. With an errant glance, you could set whole forests ablaze. When Superman looks at his opponent in "Whatever Happened to..." and says, quietly, "Burn," *you* know that *he* knows exactly what having heat vision really means. And that's what makes it so powerful.

As a fan, who are your favorite writers in comics?

I'll read just about anything Alan Moore does. He's just an astonishing writer. I've never seen anyone who can tell such good stories consistently, with such a masterful grasp of how to really use the visuals in his stories to counterpoint plot and dialogue. When he wrote *Watchmen*, he was absolutely ahead of his time, and the thing is, he's still ahead of his time. Pisses me off in the worst way.

After Alan, I'd go for the rest of the British mafia: Neil Gaiman, who is also a friend, and one of the most gifted, poetic, imaginative writers working in the field, then Grant Morrison, whose stuff is just endlessly astonishing.

Any artists you'd like to collaborate with?

I'd love to work with Alex Ross at some point. Beyond that, I really don't have any preferences. It's always a matter of matching the artist with the story.

What books do you dig?

I like what's being done in the current *Captain America* run, ditto for the *Hulk*. *Usagi Yojimbo* is a constant joy, and I try to stay current with *Grendel*. I think *FF Unstable Molecules* is brilliant. At first, I wasn't sure what the hell to make of it—which was, of course, the intent—but as it's progressed, I've locked into where he's taking the story and it's really very smart, very entertaining and, ultimately, very human. I love it when someone takes the tropes of the form and turns them upside down. I think it's good for the field as a whole to shake things up like that from time to time.

If Marvel asked you to tell the last Spider-Man story, what would it be?

Published. Other than that, I ain't gonna say, because I know what that would be and it's one hell of a story and I'm not gonna blow that here. Joe Quesada once asked me, "If you were to do *Dark Knight Returns* or 'Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow' for Spider-Man, what would it look like?" And I came up with something that'd just be massively cool. But I'm sitting on it until the day that becomes a serious conversation. If it ever does.

If you could only write one more comic book story for any publisher, what would it be?

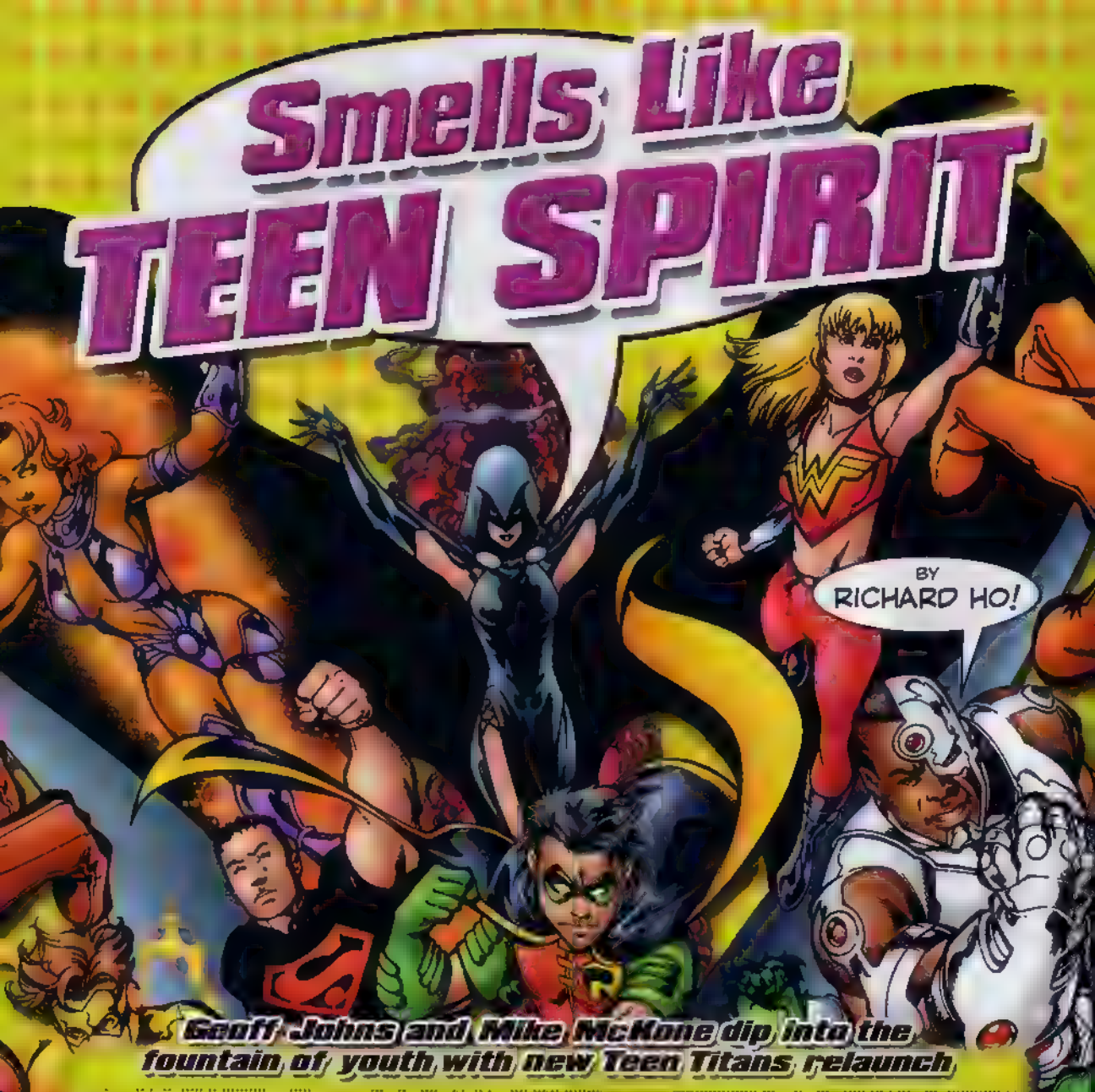
You've heard something from my doctor, haven't you? Damn it, nobody tells me anything anymore....

Your name's been mentioned in conjunction with a possible Dr. Strange series. What's happening on that front?

The Doc Strange mini, which may well lay the foundation for a regular book, is something that Marvel wants to do as soon as I get the time to do it straight through. It's kind of a re-imagining of his backstory, not so much changing it as updating it and reconsidering it in a modern, post-"Matrix" readership. A lot of what was originally conceived and drawn for the character came out of the roots of how magicians were portrayed or visualized in the '50s and '60s. The Vegas or Magic Castle act, replete with tux, cape, the whole deal.

SWINGING STRACZYNSKI Under the guiding hand of JMS, Spidey's met some new villains, gotten a new job teaching as Peter Parker and patched things up with his wife, Mary Jane.

Smells Like TEEN SPIRIT



Geoff Johns and Mike McKone dip into the fountain of youth with new Teen Titans relaunch

Most teenagers head to the mall on the weekends. But if you're a teenager who also happens to be a superhero, where do you go to unwind?

For *JSA* writer Geoff Johns, the answer is pretty simple. "You go to Titans Tower, of course!"

That's the premise behind Johns' brand-spankin' new *Teen Titans* series, set to launch July 16 courtesy of DC Comics. The series graduates *Young Justice* heroes Robin, Superboy, Wonder Girl and Impulse to the Titans, the DCU's long-standing team of next-gen superheroes. "Every Friday after school, they head to the Tower to unwind, relax and interact with people that are just like them," explains Johns. "And every Sunday night they leave. At times they'll be hanging out, training rigorously or they'll be off trying to save the world."

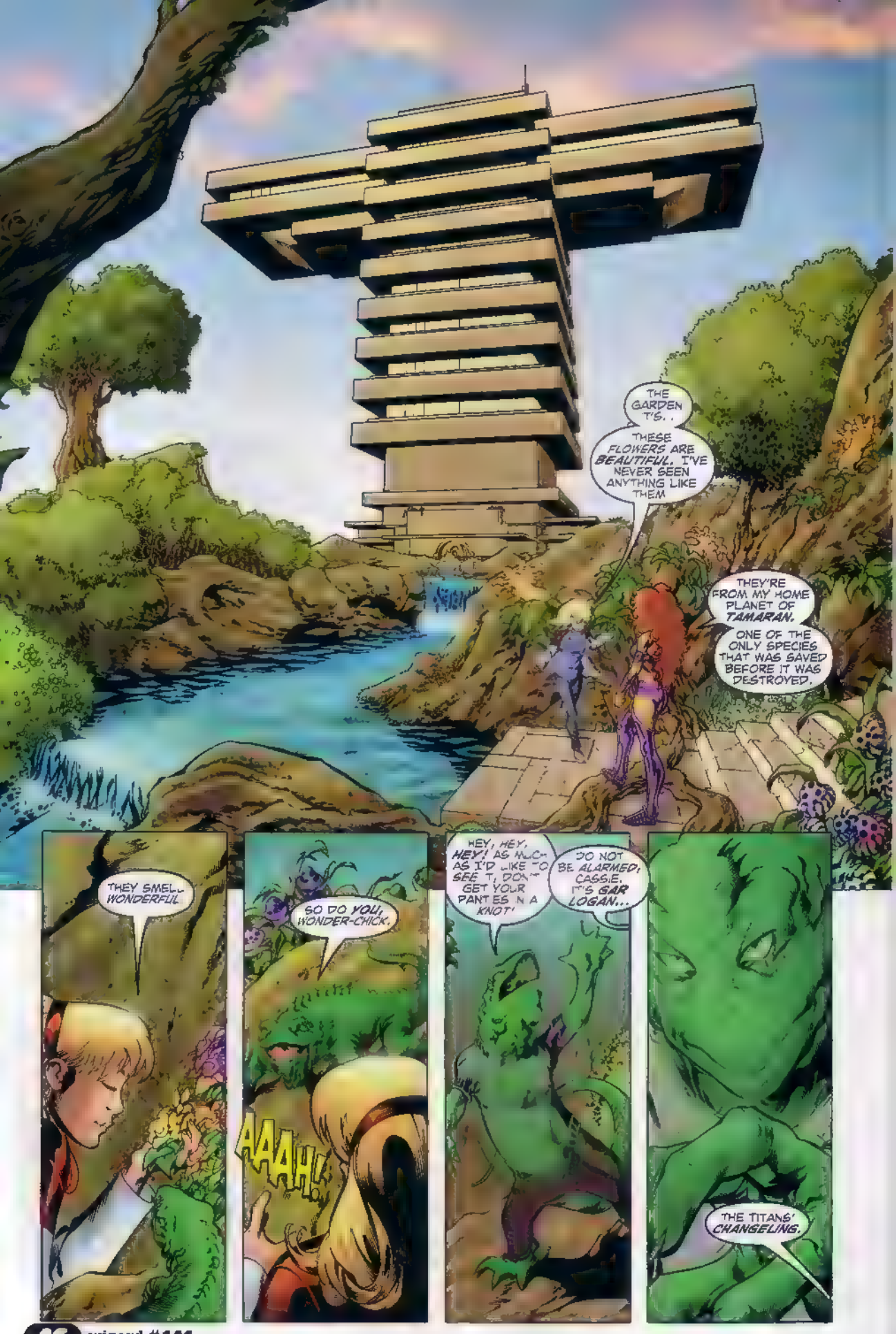
With art by former *Exiles* penciler Mike McKone, the relaunch kicks off this summer with a five-issue storyarc titled "A Kid's Game." Coming on the heels of the cataclysmic *Titans/Young Justice: Graduation Day* mini-series, the scattered and reeling ex-members of Young Justice discover that life on their own ain't easy—especially balancing superhero exploits with student life. Enter former Titans Cyborg, Starfire and Beast Boy (formerly Changeling), who offer the four teens safe haven within Titans Tower.

The fact that these vets were around during the Titans' heyday in the '80s—when the book routinely challenged the X-Men for sales supremacy—makes them perfect choices to usher in the next generation. "They try to be mentors to the new kids, because they went through the same things," explains Johns.

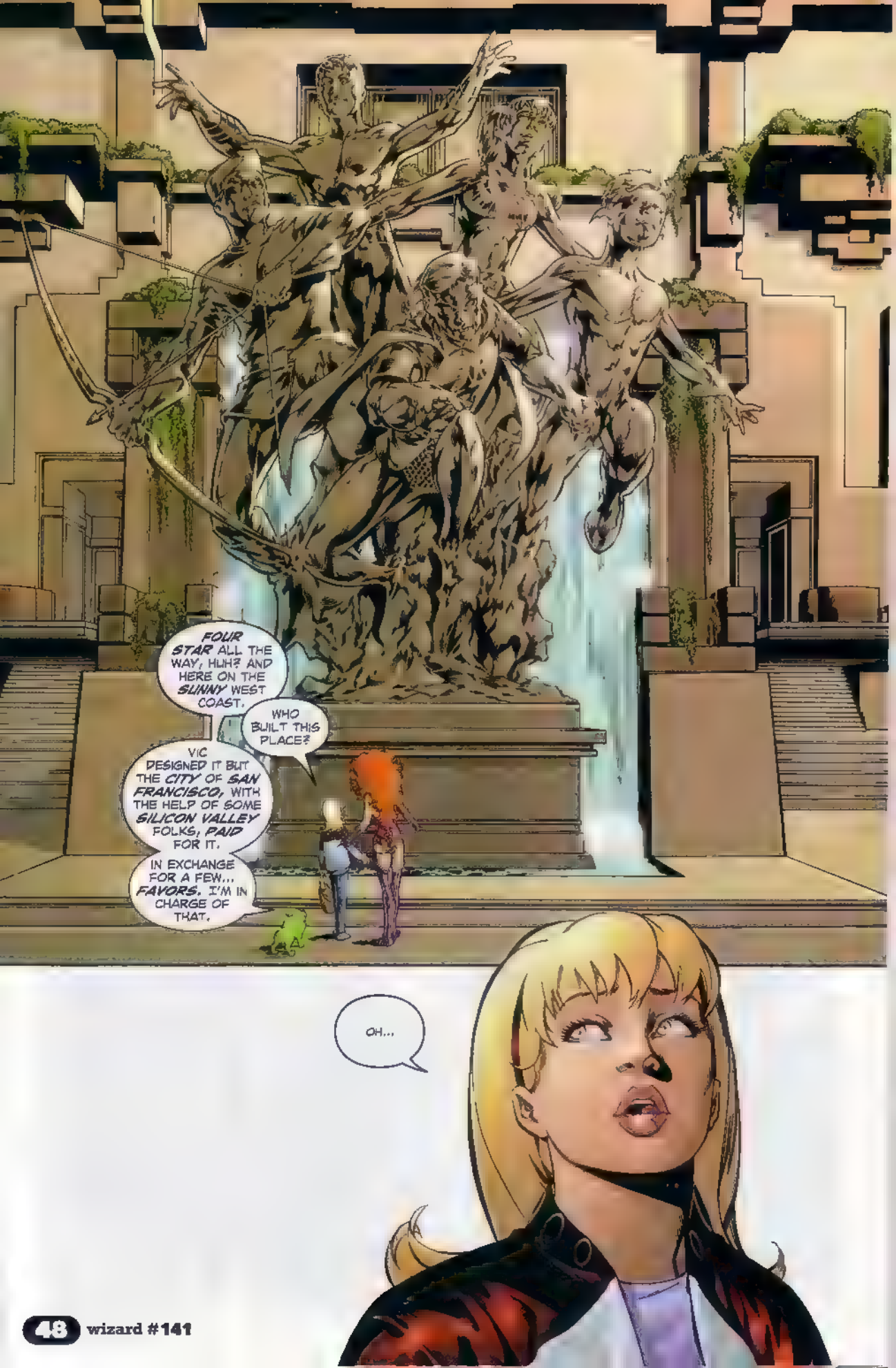
No team book is complete without a cadre of supervillains, and fans can expect an exciting mix of new and old. "The Titans definitely need strong new villains," admits Johns, who transformed Flash's Rogues Gallery into *Wizard*'s Best Villains of 2002. "But at the same time, you can't forget Deathstroke and Brother Blood. They're the two big villains in the first year, and we'll introduce new ones along the way."

And now, feast your eyes on this exclusive eight-page preview of *Teen Titans* #1! Starfire and Wonder Girl are about to arrive at Titans Tower, where the former Young Justice heroes are gathering for the first time since they disbanded. But the reunion doesn't go as smoothly as planned.

WOW.


THE GARDEN T'S..
THESE FLOWERS ARE BEAUTIFUL. I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THEM
THEY'RE FROM MY HOME PLANET OF TAMARAN.
ONE OF THE ONLY SPECIES THAT WAS SAVED BEFORE IT WAS DESTROYED.
THEY SMELL WONDERFUL
SO DO YOU, WONDER-CHICK.
AAAH!
HEY, HEY, HEY! AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO SEE T, DON'T GET YOUR PANTIES IN A KNOT!
DO NOT BE ALARMED, CASSIE. IT'S GAR LOGAN...
THE TITANS' CHANGELING.

'COURSE ALL THE GIRLS CALL ME BEAST BOY!
WHEW! SHIVER UP MY SPINE, ALWAYS HAPPENS WHEN I FL P-FL OP BETWEEN COLD-AND WARM-BLOODED AN MA_S-
--AND WITH YOU TWO AROUND I'M DEFINITELY WARM-BLOODED.
SHALL I SHOW MS. SANDSMARK TO MY ROOM?
SIT, 'BEAST BOY.'
GOOD DOG.
FOR YOU, GOLDIE--
--I'D BE A GREAT DOG.


FOUR STAR ALL THE WAY, HUH? AND HERE ON THE SUNNY WEST COAST.
WHO BUILT THIS PLACE?
VIC DESIGNED IT BUT THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, WITH THE HELP OF SOME SILICON VALLEY FOLKS, PAID FOR IT.
IN EXCHANGE FOR A FEW... FAVORS. I'M IN CHARGE OF THAT.
OH...

THE FIVE FOUNDERS.
THE FIRST ROBIN. KID FLASH. AQUALAD. SPEEDY.
WONDER GIRL.
THEY CREATED THE TEEN TITANS TO HAVE A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD GATHER WITHOUT JUDGMENT.
A PLACE TO GROW UP TOGETHER.
SO WHY ARE YOU AND MR. STONE INTERESTED IN HANGING OUT WITH A BUNCH OF TEENAGERS?
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH IT. AND IN OUR OPINION, WE CAN HELP YOU.
VICTOR WANTS THE TOWER TO BE A PLACE WHERE YOUNGER HEROES CAN FEEL ACCEPTED.
WE'LL OFFER TRAINING FACILITIES, A PLACE TO GET AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD ON THE WEEKENDS AND, MOST IMPORTANT --
-- FREEDOM.
WHAT'S THROUGH THERE?
LATER. THAT'S FOR LATER.
NO WAY! CASSIE!

LOOKS LIKE SOME OF THE OTHER TODDLERS HAVE ARRIVED.
SUPERBOY, WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE.
UH... HI.
WHOA.
ROBIN? HOW DID --? WHEN DID YOU GET HERE?
A BIT AGO. I'VE JUST BEEN LISTENING.
GET OFF, IMPULSE!
GET OFF!
WELL... THIS IS A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE, ISN'T IT?

KZZTHIS IS VICTOR STONE. WELCOME TO TITANS TOWER.
WE'VE GOT A LOT OF GROUND TO COVER THIS WEEKEND BUT IT'S GETTING LATE AS IS.
KORY AND GAR WILL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOMS.
SET YOUR ALARMS. ORIENTATION STARTS AT EIGHT SHARP.
I'M NOT GETTING UP AT EIGHT ON A SATURDAY.
YOU DON'T WANT TO OVERSLEEP, SUPERBOY. NOT WITH THE ALARM CLOCKS IN THIS PLACE.
FOLLOW THE ROBIN, ROBIN.
THAT A NEW CAPE?
ROBIN? WONDER BOY?
STOP IT, BART.
WHAT'S WITH EVERYONE?
SLEEP WELL, KIDS.
CYBORG OUT.
WANT MORE?
CHECK OUT TEEN TITANS #1 ON SALE JULY 16

KRYPTON KNIGHT

Sample six pages of SUPERMAN: BIRTHRIGHT, where Mark Waid and Leinil Yu tell the definitive origin of Superman and Lex Luthor

Forget everything you thought you knew about Superman—Mark Waid's giving birth to a new legend behind the Man of Steel.

"The trick for me is to try and find a way to re-imagine the character for a generation that dismisses him too easily as a 'big blue boy scout,'" says Waid (*Fantastic Four*). "The number one goal is to make him relevant to our lives today. If that means he has to be a little raw around the edges, a little more proactive, then so much the better. He'll always be a good man at heart, but he's not perfect."

Fans can see exactly what Waid has in mind in July when *Superman: Birthright* takes flight. With art by Leinil Yu (*Wolverine*), this 12-issue maxi-series—which has been likened as the DCU's answer to the hit WB television series "Smallville"—offers a gritty, in-continuity retelling of both the Superman and Lex Luthor beginnings, giving each origin an updated, modern twist. In the first few issues, fans will see a young Clark Kent traveling the entire globe and coming into his powers, all leading up to his inevitable first meeting with his eventual arch-nemesis.

"It's more than just a nod to 'Smallville,' it's the definitive origin of Kal-El and Lex Luthor," says Waid. "It's the story of their lives, and how they've entwined together over the years. That said, you'll see a Krypton that you've never seen before, you'll see a lot of things, frankly, that you've never seen before. And we're trying to fit it between the cracks of continuity as best we can, but our primary objective is to tell a really good story."

While both DC and Waid maintain a tight lid on the juicy story details, *Birthright* guarantees surprises and clever twists with every issue. However, the creative team and publisher really hope that *Birthright* will serve as the answer to any questions fans of the character may have, or act as a perfect jumping on point for those who always saw Big Blue as nothing more than Big Bland.

"We decided that *Birthright* should be something that can be handed to anybody who might still be asking the question, 'Who is Superman?'" hints Waid. "All the answers are in here, and we plan to cover a lot of ground, all the way from Krypton to Metropolis and everywhere in between. Compared to the other Superman titles, *Birthright* certainly has a unique energy to it, or rather, a very unique feel to it."

Waid's also quick to point out that *Birthright* will in no way take away from the John Byrne-created revamp from 1986, *The Man of Steel*, a series that served as a retelling of the Superman lore as well.

"We're certainly making an effort to work within the parameters of *Man of Steel* as best we can, but the foremost goal is to reinforce the Superman legend that everyone in the world knows: an infant child rocketed from a thriving but doomed world makes his way to Earth and exhibits powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men," notes Waid.

Clark hones those abilities traveling the globe as a reporter. During his globetrotting, Clark finds himself in Africa when a violent revolution takes place, which is where the following sequence takes place. *Wizard*'s so ahead of the curve, this sequence doesn't appear in *Birthright* — but later in the series. Check out a legend's rebirth on **page 54** right now!

By Casey Seijas

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOU CHARACTERIZE ME IN THE PRESS AS A MAN EAGER FOR *CONFLICT*. BUT I AM HERE TO TELL YOU THAT CONFLICT *EXISTS* WITH OR *WITHOUT ME*.
IT *EXISTS*--IT *THRIVES*--EACH TIME THAT MEN *ANYWHERE* ARE ALLOWED TO BELIEVE THAT *SOME* OF THEM ARE SOMEHOW *SUPERIOR* TO *OTHERS*. AND THAT IS A CONFLICT THAT WE GHUR WILL NOT *ABIDE*.
IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE THIS HARSH WORLD--IF *ALL* OF US ARE TO SURVIVE--IT WILL BE BECAUSE WE HAVE MET ONE ANOTHER WITH *OPEN HANDS*, NOT THRASHING *FISTS*.
WE COME TODAY TO CLAIM OUR PLACE AS EQUALS *AMONG* YOU--
ABENA--?
CLARK! CLARK, THE *VILLAGE*--! THEY--THEY'RE *BACK!*

THE TURAABA! WITH MOLOTOV! FLAMETHROWERS!
THEY'RE BURNING US TO THE GROUND! I HAVE TO TELL KOBE!
"THEY"? ABENA, WHO ARE YOU--

NO! THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT THE TURAABA *WANT*--TO SEND YOUR BROTHER RUNNING *HOME!* ABENA, LET ME HANDLE THIS!
HOW? NO! KOBE MUST *KNOW!* OUR HOMES-- *CHILDREN*--
I MUST TELL HIM!
SIGH!
NO, ABENA.
...TRUST ME.
WHERE DID THE SISTER GO? SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO DRAW HIM AWAY...!
VERY WELL. *REGRETTABLE,* BUT...
...SILENCE HIM.

--SO WE MUST NO LONGER LOOK TO OUR NEIGHBORS TO GIVE US A VOICE. WE MUST BE HEARD ON OUR OWN--
MR. ASURU, COME WITH US. YOU ARE UNDER ARREST.
WHAT? ON WHAT CHARGE?
WAIT? WHAT'S HE GUILTY OF?
OF SPEAKING THE TRUTH! THIS IS ABSURD!
OFF CER, RELEASE ME! EVERYONE, PLEASE STAY CALM!

LEAVE.
NOW.

CLARK...?
LIKE IT?
PICK UP YOUR COPY
OF SUPERMAN:
BIRTHRIGHT ON
JULY 2!

ENTER the MATRIX

Artist Steve Skroce infiltrated the 'The Matrix' dreamworld nearly five years ago and recently escaped. Find out what he learned.

BY MIKE COTTON

STEVE SKROCE CAN KEEP A SECRET— just try asking him about the next two "Matrix" sequels.

"I just can't talk about it," says the former *Wolverine* artist, who was recruited by the Wachowski brothers, Andy and Larry, to help storyboard all three "Matrix" movies, the second of which, "The Matrix Reloaded," is due out May 10. "I didn't sign anything. I just promised. I can tell you that I've seen them and they're awesome."

PARTY CRASHER In the Matrix, Jehovah's Witnesses are more persistent.

Skroce's loyalty to the brothers dates back to 1993, when he collaborated with Larry on the Marvel comic *Ektokid*. Skroce's comic career exploded, earning him stints on *Wolverine* and *Amazing Spider-Man* while the Wachowskis headed to Hollywood on films such as 1995's "Assassins" and "Bound" a year later. When the Wachowskis approached Skroce to bring their revolutionary vision of "The Matrix" to the screen, he jumped at the opportunity. And when "The Matrix" erupted as a box-office smash, inspiring two sequels, Skroce was forced to immerse himself in the dream-inspired world. Now with both sequels locked and reloaded (November's "The Matrix Revolutions" is already completed), Skroce has begun his triumphant return to comics with the creator-owned mini-series *Doc Frankenstein*, which he is working on while storyboarding for the upcoming Will Smith film "I, Robot."

Wizard sent out its own Agent Smith to interrogate the Vancouver resident to get the inside scoop on "The Matrix" trilogy, swapping comic stories with the Wachowskis and sizing up a Wolverine-Neo brawl.

HOUSE CALL Doc Frankenstein [illegible] rip with an aggressive bedside manner.

SKROCE

How excited are you for "The Matrix" sequels to come out so you can finally talk about them?

These movies have so much in them that it would be hard for me to even explain [the films] to someone who hasn't seen them. I couldn't do it justice. As far as the imagery goes…[*deep breath*]! It's pretty cool. I feel like once everyone sees it, then it'll be easier to talk about it because they'll know what I'm talking about. There's stuff you've never seen before.

Did you and the Wachowski brothers talk comics?

We talked about comics lots. They read my *Wolverine* stuff—they were very nice. I don't think I'll ever be point zero-zero-zero-five percent the writers they are, but they were nice. I don't think they would have said anything if they didn't like it, though.

What's the biggest difference between working on "Matrix" and the sequels?

This time around, the films are so much bigger. With the first film, it was never a go movie. It was a movie that may or may not be made. The new ones, it was a huge hit, so all the perks went way up. We had a really cool office, a little basketball court in the back, there were way more people and they had awesome little barbecues and stuff. The most fun was the socializing.

What's more fun, doing storyboards or comics?

It's awesome doing both. I love the atmosphere of working with other people. And storyboards are different than comics—you're limited by the amount of space you have to draw in action with comics, where in storyboards, it's all about doing a series of draw-

ings that will show an emotion or a camera movement. You're trying to draw something that will be live action. It's nice to go back and do comics after doing movies for a while and it's your thing and it's a little quieter. I just feel lucky that I can do both. I can work with people and then also go and do my little solitary comic book thing.

What's next for you after "I, Robot?"

I want to get back to *Doc Frankenstein*. I've enjoyed my time at the show but I really want to get back to that. It's kind of cool to put it aside for a while and then go back to it, to take your time with it. Time is always working against you when you're doing monthly books. There are always little sacrifices you make to get the job done on time. I got the first issue done but I need to do the inking. I do the odd layouts on the weekends. Not really finished pages, I do more story beats. I want to have it nearly done before I put it out. I don't want to bring out anything that'll be late.

Any mainstream comic work planned?

I still love the Marvel books. One of the things that sucks is that when I worked there, I got all their books for free and now I don't work there and I don't get the books. And now I read more Marvels than I've ever read before. That [J. Michael] Straczynski *Amazing Spider-Man* stuff is great—he's so good. I went back and bought all his trade paperbacks. *Midnight Nation* is a really neat book.

So, who wins in a fight: Wolverine or Neo?

In a fight? In the Matrix, Neo wins, of course.

Be honest: Ever had a conversation with your computer?

My computer has never spoken to me. So far, so good between me and my computer.

Are you rooting for "The Matrix Reloaded" to kick the ass of "X2?"

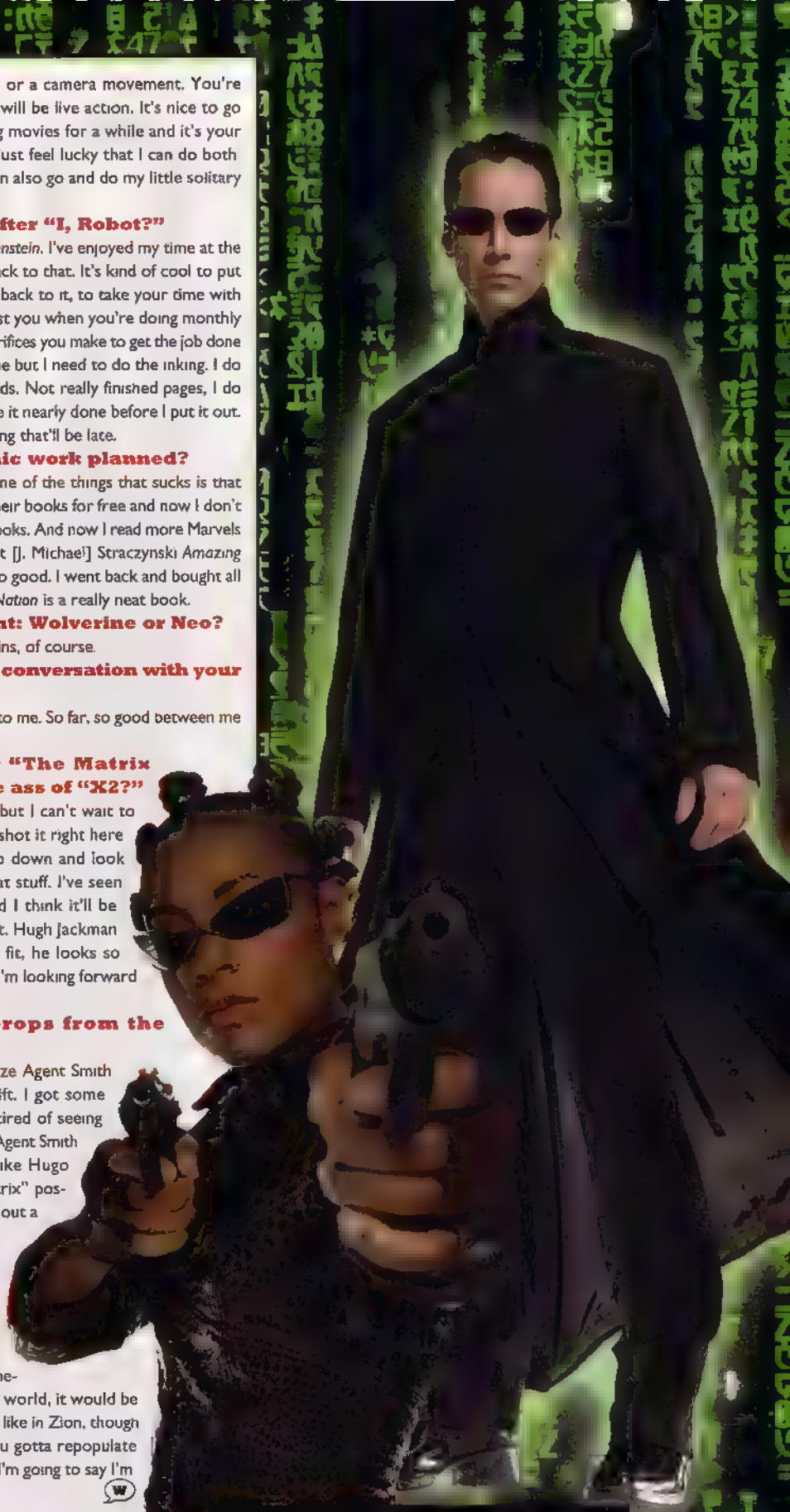
Sure, I root for the "Matrix," but I can't wait to see "X2." It looks great. They shot it right here in [Vancouver] and I got to go down and look around. There was a lot of neat stuff. I've seen a few rough things from it and I think it'll be great. Nightcrawler looks great. Hugh Jackman kicks butt. He got even more fit, he looks so buff. He looks just like Wolvie. I'm looking forward to both movies.

Did you snag any props from the "Matrix" sets?

I got a few props. I got a full-size Agent Smith mannequin. That was a nice gift. I got some T-shirts too. My wife's pretty tired of seeing me in my Matrix wardrobe. But Agent Smith is like 6' 2"; it looks exactly like Hugo Weaving. That's my prize "Matrix" possession. It kind of freaks people out a little though.

Last question: Does Steve Skroce take the red pill or blue pill?

That's the toughy, isn't it? That's the big philosophical question. Maybe if they did something about the food in the real world, it would be easier for me. I've seen what it's like in Zion, though, and there's a lot of hotties. You gotta repopulate the Earth and all of that. Damn, I'm going to say I'm a red pill guy.



MEN (AND WOMEN) IN BLACK Jada Pinkett Smith (front) joins Keanu Reeves in the fight against virtual oppression in "The Matrix Reloaded."

Fringe Benefits

From black ops to bird-brains and noir to New Age, **WIZARD** spotlights four comic titles that provide wildly different takes on the superhero genre

If you dig capes and cowls but want a different take on the genre, then *Wizard*'s got a quartet of titles you can't afford to pass up.

Love the black ops/spy element of shows like "Alias" and "24"? You'll definitely stay up nights enjoying WildStorm's *Sleeper*. Maybe you dig noir crime stories with a bizarre Dick Tracy-like edge? Dark Horse's *Nevermen* will ensure you'll never look at comics the same way again. If New Age mysticism is your bag, you'll wanna set your watch to Image's *The Clock Maker*, but if high-flying sci-fi action with dark psychological undertones gets your blood racing, you'll want to line your nest with Top Cow's *Battle of the Planets*.

Got all that? Good, now flip ahead to find out exactly why you'll wanna add these titles to your pull list. Trust us—if you love superhero comics, you'll be kissing these superhero cousins by the end of your first date!

BY ANDY SERWIN AND JESSE THOMPSON

fits

Nevermen (Dark Horse Comics)

One part 'Matrix,' one part 007, this team of shadow hunters takes on bizarre mobsters exiled from 'X-Files'

Never say never…unless you're talking up how good Dark Horse's *Nevermen* series is.

Artificial constructs created by a scientific genius, the shadowy Nevermen protect Midnight City, a hybrid metropolis combining a 1940s feel with modern-day technology, using James Bond-style gadgets against an array of arch-villains that would leave Dick Tracy scratching his flattop in bewilderment.

And if you think *Nevermen* sounds unlike any comic being published today, you'd be right. In fact, writer Phil Amara had a very specific mission in mind when crafting the series: think different.

"When I was a kid, the cool stuff to read was Frank Miller's *Daredevil*, John Byrne on *Fantastic Four* and [Marv] Wolfman/[George] Pérez on *New Teen Titans*," explains Amara. "Nevermen harkens back to the chances those guys took with the mainstream stuff I've always admired that."

Admiring *Nevermen* comes easy when you take into account the atmospheric artwork of Guy Davis (*Sandman Mystery Theatre*), combined with the breakneck storytelling concocted by Amara and the grotesque array of fearsome villains our heroes must combat.

Readers will find themselves on the edge of their seats as the Nevermen combat menaces like the Cadaver, a disembodied head who can mentally control not only the other pieces of his body (he commands his hands to play the piano from across the room), but his horde of chimpanzee butlers who act as muscle when the Nevermen come calling uninvited

Or if colorfully clad, devil-may-care cavaliers are more your style, you'll thrill to the Nevermen's battle with Manboulian and his horde of zombie art thieves as they raid the city's top art museum. But if hard-nosed fisticuffs are more your speed, you'll gnaw your fingernails to the nub while the Nevermen brawl with the League of Crows in an abandoned junkyard for the fate of the city (imagine the fight between Batman and the Mutant leader from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, multiplied by 100!).

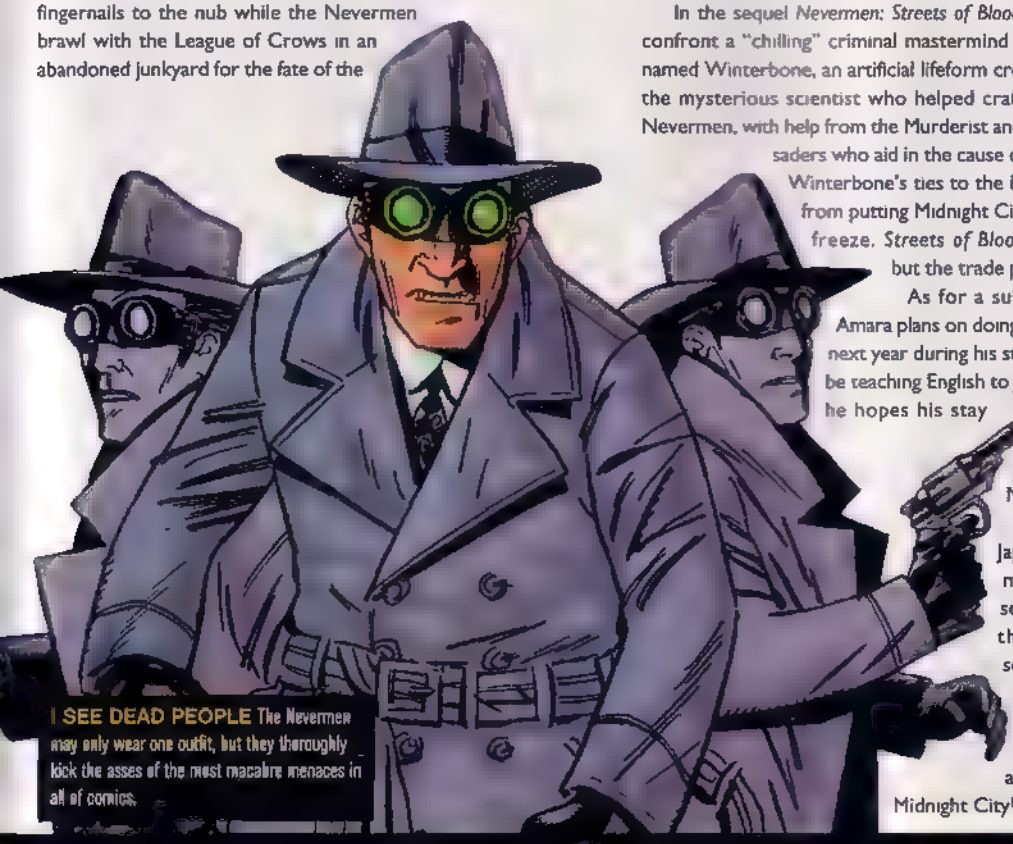
In the first *Nevermen* trade paperback (available now), the Nevermen team up with the Murderist—a former cohort-turned-vigilante with hydraulic killing machines attached to his body—to stop a deranged scientist called Clockwork and his gang of criminals from destroying Midnight City

In the sequel *Nevermen: Streets of Blood*, the Nevermen must confront a "chilling" criminal mastermind with sub-zero powers named Winterbone, an artificial lifeform created by the Professor, the mysterious scientist who helped craft the Nevermen. The Nevermen, with help from the Murderist and the other bizarre crusaders who aid in the cause of justice, must uncover Winterbone's ties to the Professor and stop him from putting Midnight City in a permanent deep freeze. *Streets of Blood* wrapped in March, but the trade paperback ships July 30.

As for a subsequent mini-series, Amara plans on doing some writing over the next year during his stay in Japan, where he'll be teaching English to Japanese students. And he hopes his stay there will be reflected in the third Nevermen installment.

"I'm going to let the Japanese culture get into my digestive system, and see how that influences the next Nevermen series," notes Amara.

Ninjas, samurais and Japanese demons? Sounds like just another wild night in Midnight City! ■ **ANDY SERWIN**



I SEE DEAD PEOPLE The Nevermen may only wear one outfit, but they thoroughly kick the asses of the most macabre menaces in all of comics.

Battle of the Planets (Top Cow/Image)

Ninja teens with 'tude tackle the alien forces of Spectra bent on conquering Earth through subversion

ENJOYING YOURSELF?
LIKE YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE
YOU'VE SCREWED US ROYALLY. YOU KNOW THAT? FOR A GUY WHO CAN SPLIT HAIRS WITH HIS EYES CLOSED -- YOU SURE WERE SLOPPY BACK THERE.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER The most brutal of G-Force, Jason (below) creates tense situations for teammates Tiny (the owl guy at left) and Keyop (the, uh, weird lookin' kid).

For most teens, a crisis constitutes finding a date for the dance, borrowing the car Friday night or getting that trig homework done before fifth period.

Unless you're a member of G-Force. Then things get more complicated, such as stopping a secret alien invasion from the forces of Spectra, fighting off the 28 million mind-controlled citizens of Central West who all want you dead, or defeating the Iron Terrapin, a mechanical death machine taller than the Empire State Building.

"The burden of saving the world, that's a lot for teens to deal with," explains Munier Sharrieff, writer of Top Cow's action-packed psycho-drama, *Battle of the Planets*. "They undergo all this training and crazy sh– at a young age, and it gets to you after awhile.

"These guys are definitely costumed superheroes, but they don't have a city to protect; it's the entire world!" continues Sharrieff. "They have secret identities, alter egos, colorful costumes, a lair and all that stuff, but underneath, I'm trying to add some psychological darkness to make it more relevant."

Led by Chief Anderson, G-Force's five orphaned teens are Mark, Jason, Princess, Tiny and Keyop. Plucked for this assignment at a young age, the teen members of G-Force underwent years of rigorous physical training, painful scientific enhancements and tutelage in a deadly killing art that has at least one of its members terrified. "I know the things we were taught, the dark secret things," proclaims Keyop in issue #1, "Using those skills to beat up mechs is cool, but we're gonna use that stuff on real people one day…I just don't think I can."

But the decision gets taken out of Keyop's hands when G-Force gets their first assignment—stop the marauding mechanical menace called the Iron Terrapin before it can destroy the cold fusion reactor in the super-city called Central West. G-Force succeeds—a bit too easily, as it turns out. Zoltar—the twisted mind behind Spectra's plans on Earth—used the Terrapin as a diversion to set up his real scheme: to take control of all 28 million people living in Central West and use them as fodder while stealing a top-secret military satellite with artificial consciousness that can destroy any other airborne object!

It's not just the world-threatening magnitude of menaces that G-Force faces, it's the way they dispatch their enemies that makes their adventures so pulse-pounding. In issue #2, Keyop carves up a twisted scientist like a Thanksgiving turkey when he learns the doc performs gory animal experiments; Jason boasts that "we can put our bare fingertips through a man's skull," in issue #4; Tiny and Princess take out a squadron of Spectra goons—in a pitch-black room—without transmuting into their costumed guises; Mark survives an explosion and a fall from a high-rise in issue #5; Jason takes on an entire army of Spectra soldiers by himself in issue #8; and…well, you get the picture.

Rendered in a spot-on anime style by Wilson Tortosa, *Battle* heats up this summer as G-Force and Spectra continue their showdown for supremacy, with more jaw-dropping fights, including a tussle between G-Force leader Mark and Zoltar in issue #9 that turns bloodier than a day at the slaughterhouse. The first series wraps up in August's issue #12, but after that, look for a Battle of the Planets/Voltron crossover in September, followed by a relaunch in November as *G-Force* with a six-issue mini-series by the current team of Sharrieff, Tortosa and series art director Alex Ross.

So even though the G-Force kids save the planet three or four times before lunch, they still can't get a summer vacation. Maybe Chief Anderson will let them take out the God Phoenix next Friday. ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

Sleeper (WildStorm)

TV's 'Alias' meets 'Donnie Brasco' in the dark corners of the WildStorm Universe

Tony Soprano, meet Holden Carver, star of *Sleeper*, Wildstorm's latest series also set in society's seedy underbelly.

"We want this series to be like an HBO show on paper instead of just a comic book," says writer Ed Brubaker, who co-created the gritty, who-do-you-trust title with artist Sean Phillips (*Uncanny X-Men*). "It needs to read like an episode of 'The Sopranos' or 'The Wire' because if you're going to do a story that focuses mainly on the bad guys, the hook is that you have to be intrigued by them."

While Holden isn't technically one of the bad guys, things would be easier for him if he was. An operative for covert government agency Internal Operations (IO), Holden has infiltrated "the other side," a shady superhuman organization run by the menacing Tao (best known to *WildC.A.T.s* fans as a super-intelligent synthetic turncoat).

"[Editor] Scott [Dunbier] really liked the character of Tao and felt that ever since Alan Moore had left *WildC.A.T.s*, no one had done anything interesting with him," says Brubaker. "Scott described the character to me as a combination of Ozymandias and Hannibal Lecter."

But while Ozymandias sought to save the world, no one's quite sure of Tao's agenda, especially Holden. This makes his job as a double agent all the more difficult, especially given that his commanding officer Lynch, a black ops bastard, is the only person who knows of his assignment. Oh, and Lynch currently teeters between life and death in a coma.

Holden's tribulations began four years ago when he accidentally wiped out his entire combat unit after obtaining superpowers from a mysterious alien artifact that his team was sent to recover. The artifact gave Holden the ability to absorb and stockpile pain (without feeling it himself) and release it by touching his victim. It also made him catatonic. Upon awaking, he found that Lynch had built a killer rep for Holden by falsely disseminating that he'd gone rogue, killed his team and stolen the artifact. Lynch hoped correctly that it would impress Tao to recruit Holden. Brubaker puts his situation best: "think Donnie Brasco as a superhero undercover in an organization of supervillains."

Now, Holden has been forced to make decisions that have him questioning his own worth as a hero. In issue #1, he's sent out on a mission with another lieutenant named Nihilist. Their objective? Take out a group of competitive high-tech mobsters. However, Holden—under Tao's direct orders—must determine whether or not Nihilist is a suspected spy in the organization! Turns out he is. Although Nihilist may have been one of the good guys, Holden still kills him with a powerful electro-blast shock to the head.

LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING HOLDEN...
HOW MANY OF MY TORPEDOES DO YOU THINK WOULD HAVE THE STONES TO SIT AT ONE OF MY INQUIRIES AND LIE TO ME?
NONE, I'M GUESSING
NO
THERE WERE TWO, NOW THERE WILL ONLY BE ONE...

MISERY LOVES COMPANY Agent Holden Carver (above left panel) must gain the trust of Tao (above) and Miss Misery (below) while he takes their organization down from inside.

"Holden's forced to do all of these things in order to survive and it becomes a question of, can you still be a good guy if you do all sorts of bad things?" asks Brubaker. "Is it all just a state of mind? Do your actions dictate your morality, or is it the other way around?"

Holden gains Tao's trust by issue #2 and moves up to the exclusive rank of Prodigal. In issues #3 and #4, Holden and fellow Prodigal Miss Misery (a sexy sadist who's above simpleminded concepts such as good and evil) team up to infiltrate a group of premier private citizens who literally rule the world (controlling everything from wars to who tops pop charts).

With Brubaker treating *Sleeper* as if it were a TV series, issues #5-#9 serves as Act Two of the unfolding saga.

"Issue #5 finds Holden trying to locate someone in IO who he can start feeding information to and the frustration behind that," reveals Brubaker, "and issue #6 starts to heat up some of the tension between Holden and one of the higher-up bad guys, one of whom is having suspicions about another mole inside, with Holden the most likely candidate."

Forget about premium cable channels. Wake up and read *Sleeper*!

■ JESSE THOMPSON

The Clock Maker (Image)

With a Hitchcockian murder mystery and the doorway to Heaven about to open, you can't beat the Clock

At the foot of a massive set of world-powering clockworks, a double murder has occurred. With the clock ticking, Astrid Bonn intends to find out whodunit.

Set in the snow-covered Alps of Switzerland, Image Comics' *The Clock Maker* follows Astrid Bonn, an Americanized 20-something who's inherited the responsibility of maintaining a massive set of clockworks, located deep with in a hollowed-out peak. (Imagine the top of a mountain chopped off and a giant grandfather clock slid into its crevice.) Not only does Astrid know little about clocks, but these clockworks keep the Earth balanced, making sure the planet spins on its axis properly! While trying to grasp the scope of her duties, Astrid investigates the bloody deaths of the previous overseers of the clockworks—her father and brother

HICKORY, DICKORY DOCK The "mice" in Clock Maker are caught in a murder mystery. One likely suspect: Five O'Clock Shadow (right), judging by that toothpick he carries.

"When it comes down to it, this series is a giant murder mystery set on this giant clockworks," says writer Jim Krueger, of his 12-issue mini-series. The suspects top off at six characters, and according to Krueger, "most of them are not going to survive the experience."

The whodunit mystery unfolds like a complex game of Clue. Issue #1 shows Gunther and Nicolaus Bonn (Astrid's father and brother, respectively) brutally murdered at the claws of an unseen, feral creature. So far, only a handful of suspects who could have control over the beast have been revealed.

First, there's Hans (think Colonel Mustard in lederhosen), a headstrong, self-proclaimed servant of God who claims to have been guided to the mountain by a higher power and appointed the task of constructing the clockworks. It's Hans' duty to prepare Astrid for the clockworks' maintenance, but they frequently butt heads due to Astrid's lack of worthiness for her sacred duty. Herbert, a withered old man shown in issue #2 (a sadistic Professor Plum), clearly has his own agenda as he's seen feeding what appears to be the murderous creature. And then there's Astrid's mother, who turns up briefly in issue #1 spouting seemingly nonsensical warnings of a "crocodile smile" and counting "three hands, not two." Could this loopy Mrs. Peacock have bore ill will towards her own family?

"The mom plays a major part," says Krueger, slyly.

As Astrid copes with the deaths of her father and brother, her inconceivable duties (including recruiting new clock-keepers from a specified list) and Hans' assertions that a doorway directly to Heaven will soon open at the clockworks, even more secrets remain untold.

Adding to the mystery, artists Matt Smith, Zach Howard and Michael Halbleib incorporate moments of genuine creepiness, especially in issue #2. As Astrid questions how the clockworks can be connected to Heaven if her father and brother were killed there, the camera pans down to an open waterway scattered with skeletal remains. "Your father and brother have not been the only...accidents," says Hans ominously.

In order to present both the sheer scope of the clockworks, Krueger pursued an oversized format for *The Clock Maker* for widescreen treatment.

"The hope was to make *The Clock Maker* more cinematic," says Krueger. "And I just love big comics. I grew up on treasury editions, and I wanted to see the art as big as possible."

Big art will come in handy as upcoming issues will finally see the resident clock-keepers in action. Issue #3 introduces the Five O'Clock Shadow (a villain Krueger likens to Dr. Doom) and issue #5 features the first battle in the raging lava pits beneath the clockworks between Hans and the creature that killed Astrid's family. As more questions are answered, Krueger promises an operatic final battle.

"When we get into later issues, there's definitely a bunch of 'Empire Strikes Back' [scenes] in it, too," he says. "I'd say you can expect a scene of everyone who's still surviving duking it out on the walkways." ■ **JESSE THOMPSON**

terfere!

WIZ CATS 2003

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND, THE WIZARD COMIC APTITUDE TEST (WIZCAT) WILL BEND YOUR BRAIN WITH 50 OF THE TOUGHEST COMIC TRIVIA QUESTIONS EVER ASSEMBLED!

BY THE WIZARD PROFESSOR
ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETE WOODS

a cakewalk.

and get to it, fanboy.

1 Spider-Man: everyman hero and the guy who nailed Kirsten Dunst. Speaking of which, is every part of his body spidery-sticky or just his hands and feet?

2 Batman: spooky and shadowy. So why'd he have a bright yellow insignia on his otherwise dark costume?

3 Gamma, Gamma, Hey! How are the Hulk and She-Hulk related?

4 In his first appearance, how many claws did Wolverine have on each hand?

5 What were the Seven Deadly Sins located in the secret chamber where Captain Marvel first met the wizard Shazam?

6 THE ROCK SAYS: "What wrestling federation is the Fantastic Four's Thing a former heavyweight champion of?"

7 J'Onn J'Onzz, the Martian Manhunter.. haunted survivor of Mars and eater of lil' choclatey cookies. Who was responsible for bringin' his shiny green heinie to Earth?

8 AVENGERS ASSEMBLE! Who were the founding members of the Avengers? No, wait, that's too easy. Who were the founding members of the *West Coast* Avengers?

9 No such thing as too many Avengers questions. Didja know current Avenger Ant-Man (Scott Lang) did jail time? No, really! Guess what for.

10 Mr. Fantastic! Plastic Man! That coily guy from "The Impossibles!" None are as lame as Ralph Dibny, DC's Elongated Man. So how'd Mr. Digby get his stretchy powers?

11 J. Jonah Jameson: playa-hata. Why's he got such a mad-on for Spider-Man?

12 Jameson's astronaut son John transformed into what lunar-themed super-villain?

13 Behold...the third in the J. Jonah Jameson triumvirate of questions! Name three bona fide supervillains Jonah had a hand in making in an attempt to squish Spidey.

14 Justice League America, Justice League Europe, Justice League International...all wannabes! Name the full roster of the greatest League ever, the Justice League Antarctica!

15 Which of these mutants' first contact with the X-Men wasn't as a supervillain: Rogue, Banshee or Thunderbird I?

16 WARNING! PRE-CRISIS QUESTION: Kryptonite...evil Krypton space rocks, star of the WB's *Smallville* and capable of putting the big kibosh on Superman. But that's just what green kryptonite does. Name five colors of kryptonite and what they do.

17 BLACK POWER! Which of the following "Black" characters isn't white: Blackout, Black Knight, Black Widow, Black Queen, Black Talon or Black Cat?

18 BLACKER POWER! Which of the following "Black" characters really isn't black: Black Goliath, Black Racer, Blacklash or Black Manta?

19 What does "Lobo" mean? And no, we don't mean in Spanish. What does it mean in the dialect of the savage Khund?

20 What was Nightcrawler doing when the Prof. X first encountered him?

21 Name 16—you read right, SIXTEEN—animal-themed Spidey villains.

22 And now a question just to fill space: name all the members of Captain Carrot's Amazing Zoo Crew

23 Possibly harder than that "Zoo Crew" question: Name each member of the original Challengers of the Unknown team AND their specialty

DO YOU SMELL WHAT THE THING IS COOKIN'? Take a stroll down Jabroni Drive to question #6 and find out.

ANSWER KEY 1. Everywhere, though it's concentrated in his hands and feet; 2. It's a reinforced bulletproof target meant to draw fire; 3. They're cousins. 4. Three. Relax, we're just messin' with ya. 5. Pride, Envy, Sloth, Greed, Anger, Lust and Gluttony. 6. The U.C.W.F. (Unlimited Class Wrestling Federation). 7. Professor Saul Erdel. 8. Hawkeye, Mockingbird, Wonder Man, Iron Man (James Rhodes) and Tigra. And for you, completists, the original Avengers lineup was Hulk, Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp). 9. Burglary. 10. By drinking "gonpold" (whatever the heck *that* is!) 11. He feels that costumed "heroes" like Spidey take away from REAL heroes like his son, John (an astronaut). 12. The Man-Wolf. 13. The Spider-Slayer (we're only counting this once even though there were like eight of these things). The Scorpion and the Human Fly (and no, "Man-Wolf" doesn't count even though technically Jonah had a hand—or at least an appendage—in making him). 14. Multi-Man, Major Disaster, Mighty Bruce, Cluemaster, Clock King, Big Sir, Scarlet Skier & G'noot. 15. Thunderbird I. 16. Anti-Kryptonite: Kills non-powered Kryptonians, Blue: Bizarro kryptonite that only effects Bizarros, Gold: Takes away Kryptonians' powers permanently, Green: Kills Kryptonians, Jewel: Allows the Phantom Zone to cause explosions on the outside world, Red: Has a different effect every time, Silver: A fake Kryptonite Jimmy Olsen invented, White: Destroys plant life, X-Kryptonite: Gives Terrans Kryptonian powers for a limited time, Yellow: A fake Kryptonite invented by Lex Luthor. 17. Black Talon. 18. Blacklash. 19. "He who devours your entrails and thoroughly enjoys it." 20. Being hunted by a crazed mob that wanted to kill him. 21. Vulture, Grizzly, Kangaroo, Jackal, The Human Fly, Dr. Octopus, Puma, Hammerhead, Black Cat, Man-Wolf, Lizard, Rhino, Beetle, Dr. (or Dr. II), Scorpion, Tarantula (I-III), Spider-Wasp, Fox, Black Fox, Leap Frog, Chameleon, Stegron, Dragonfly (I-II), the Gibbon, the Spot, the White Rabbit and Iguana (and no, even though Kraven wears leopard pants, he doesn't count). 22. Captain Carrot, Fastback, Pig Iron, Alley-Kat-Abra, Yankee Poodle and Rubber Duck (and yeah, Little Cheese—a mouse—was in there too, but he wasn't a human or anything. Loser). 23. Ace Morgan, jet pilot; Prof. Haley, marine biologist & all-around genius; Red Riley, circus acrobat & climber; Rocky Davis, strongman & wrestler

BORN IN THE USA Hey, at least it's not Cap-Wolf. March on over to questions #29–#31 to test your star-spangled I.Q. doubletime, soldier!

24 What was the first-ever crossover in the modern Marvel Universe (Silver Age and after)?

25 Another first! What was the first ever Marvel/DC jointly produced comic?

26 What did Hellboy eat that made his demonic brethren recoil in shock and horror?

27 God, Wonder Woman is like SO hot. Speaking of gods, which demigod once enslaved all of the Amazons?

28 ...sorry. We're still imagining what it'd be like enslaving an island of woman who all look like George Pérez drew them. Where were we? Hercules? Okay, in the original *Hercules: Prince of Power* mini-series, how did the son of Zeus best the nigh-omnipotent Galactus?

29 Cap question #1 of 3: For brief stint, Captain America—in his civilian I.D. of Steve Rogers—became a comic book artist in the Marvel Universe. What comic did he draw?

ANSWER KEY 24. It's a tie. *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 (featuring the FF) and *Fantastic Four* #12 (featuring the Hulk)—both came out in March 1963; 25. *The Wizard of Oz* (1975); 26. Pancakes (or "pancakes"); 27. Hercules; 28. By getting him drunk (or at least trying); 29. *Captain America*, and it was as stupid as it sounds

REAL GENIUS

They're some of comics' biggest nerds, and they get paid big bucks to tell stories about our favorite heroes and villains. But how much do they *really* know about the characters whose lives they live? The way of our five pros have what it takes to get a perfect 12th point score? Let's just say you'll see us at Dawn in summer school.

CHUCK AUSTEN

Writer of *Uncanny X-Men*, *Captain America* and many other Marvel books

SCORE: 42

IAN RAKHEJA BENDIS

The man behind *Powers*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Daredevil*, *Alias*, *Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Fallout*, *Ultimate Origin*, *Ultimate Nightmare*, *Ultimate Power*, *Ultimate War*, *Ultimate Secret*, *Ultimate Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate Ultimate Ultimate 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*Ultimate Fantastic Four*, *Ultimate

BY THE WIZARD STAFF

JUSTICE DEPT.

With 2003 looming as a banner year for the Justice League, WIZARD whips up loads of League goodies—including a sneek peek at Alex Ross' 'Liberty and Justice'!

ILLUSTRATION BY PHIL JIMENEZ, COLORING BY HI-FI DESIGN

League contraction may be all the rage in baseball, but DC's "league"—the Justice League of America—stands poised to conquer the comics landscape in 2003.

The World's Greatest Superheroes—including icons and team mainstays like Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and the Flash—prep for a banner year in 2003, and the most anticipated League event has to be Paul Dini and Alex Ross' 90-page oversized graphic novel, *JLA: Liberty and Justice*.

In it, the League—the Silver Age version of the "Big Seven"—must deal with an impending alien invasion in a story that, according to Ross, "takes the Justice League and uses them in a way that seem plausible, like they would if they were operating in the real world. You'll believe, by the way this is handled, in the hopeful realism of the Justice League."

For fans of Ross' work on superhero sagas like *Marvels* and *Kigndom Come*, *Liberty and Justice* returns the fan-favorite, ultra-talented painter to the realm he's best known for: "big pretty pictures of characters punching things and flying all over the place; the multi-character extravaganza that apparently everybody wants me to go back to."

And to whet your appetite for *Liberty and Justice*, scheduled to hit in November, we've got a two-page sneak peek at some of Ross' sketches from the one-shot.

But before you go skipping ahead, keep in mind there's plenty more going on in this JLA Mamma-Jamma, including an update on the regular *JLA* series by Joe Kelly, Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen and plenty of whacky hijinks starring some of the League's...well, let's just call them "minor league" members, shall we? And to kick things off, our first featurette serves up a humdinger for ya: The Top 10 Greatest JLA Stories of All Time!

THE TOP 10 GREATEST JLA STORIES

10 JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA (VOL. 1) #252-#254

Despite the fact this team consists of the worst-ever lineup—boasting scrubs like Vibe, Steel, Gypsy and Vixen—it's that "loser" mentality that makes this story resonate. Does this team have a hope of stopping the nearly omnipotent Despero, who possesses the power to alter reality to his whim? We're not telling!

9 JLA: HEAVEN'S LADDER

Only an oversized book would be big enough to contain a story of this magnitude. Written by über-scribe Mark Waid (*Fantastic Four*) with gorgeous, hyper-detailed artwork by Bryan Hitch (*Ultimates*), *Heaven's Ladder* starts with an alien race stealing the Earth—and it only gets bigger and crazier from there!

8 JLA: YEAR ONE

Great dialogue and team dynamics shine through in this story. The League deals with being the premier superteam, the media's fascination with them and their role compared to the rest of the Silver Age heroes—and did we mention an impending alien invasion and a possible traitor in their midst? All good reasons to pick up *Year One*, by Mark Waid, Brian Augustyn and Barry Kitson.

7 JLA: TOWER OF BABEL TPB

The Justice League's greatest foe stands revealed. His name? The Batman. Ra's Al Ghul steals plans devised by Batman to thwart each of the Leaguers (in case of emergency) and vanquishes the entire group (Superman falls prey to a synthetic red Kryptonite that turns his skin translucent [right], etc.). While the League eventually triumphs, writer Mark Waid brands Batman as a paranoid traitor who's ousted unceremoniously from the ranks.

6 JLA (VOL. 2) #8-#9

It's Green Arrow Connor Hawke's first day as a Leaguer—and the entire team's down for the count, incapacitated by the amped-up Key, who "unlocks" the minds of the big guns, allowing them to unconsciously drift through the lives they secretly desire. After losing his quiver and arrows, GA breaks into the JLA trophy room to borrow pop Ollie Queen's trick arrows. You WILL believe a boxing glove arrow can save the day!

5 JLA: SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPERHEROES

In this Elseworlds tale, fledgling speedster Bart Allen discovers that there's an entire secret society of heroes blessed with abilities far beyond those of normal humans. Yet Bart soon finds out that his new friends are far from heroic, and it's up to him to stop them before the world learns of the SSSH's true intentions.

4 JLA: EARTH 2 HC

Welcome to Earth 2, a place where evil always wins and the Crime Syndicate, evil versions of the JLA, rule with an iron fist—but not if the JLA and Lex Luthor have anything to say about it. This dimension-spanning epic by the *New X-Men* team of Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely answers the question: Can good truly triumph over evil? Find out why it *can't* right here.

3 JUSTICE LEAGUE: A NEW BEGINNING TPB

Not only did this series mix second-string heroes (Guy Gardner, Booster Gold) with established veterans (Batman, Martian Manhunter) thus giving a unique perspective on the dynamics of a superteam, it also injected something into the series that had never been there before—a sense of humor.

2 JLA/JSA: VIRTUE AND VICE HC

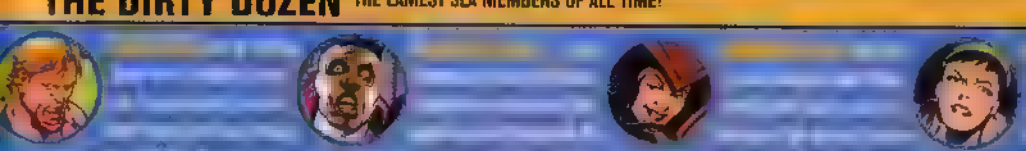
The best story in the history of this crossover, *Virtue and Vice* stars both groups battling against two of their most powerful opponents for the fate of the universe. Want more? How about a battle between the squads? Terrific art by Carlos Pacheco? A gripping story by Geoff Johns and David Goyer? This story's got it all!

1 JLA: NEW WORLD ORDER TPB

The "Big Seven" battle to save the world from an army of White Martians—each with powers comparable to Superman's! Big ideas by writer Grant Morrison, bigger action (watch Supes tear the White Martians a new one!) and the biggest characters: It's the tale that put the League back on the map, perfectly nailed the characterizations and set the standard for every story to come.

THE DIRTY DOZEN

THE LAMEST JLA MEMBERS OF ALL TIME!



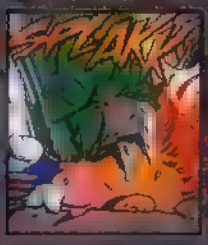
GARD DUTY

THE GREATEST GUY GARDNER BITCH-SLAPS OF ALL TIME!

For somebody who once possessed the most powerful weapon in the universe, former Green Lantern Guy Gardner sure got his ass handed to him on a platter a lot. Beware, Sinestro...heck, even Blue Beetle got a few good licks in. Here are the hard-nut brawler's most memorable mishaps:

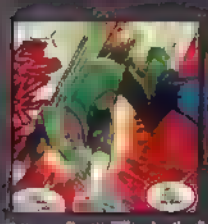
1. GUY VS. MAL JORDAN
(GREEN LANTERN [VOL. 2] #50)

Jordan returns to Earth after assimilating the core GL Corps and wants his power back. A deluded Guy (is there any other?) wants to keep it. Guy sends Jordan into a cosmic space fistfight, and naturally, he was wrong. Guy smacks his face on the hydrant, breaks his head punching a brick wall and gets his ass soundly trounced by a child.



2. GUY VS. DOOMSDAY
(JUSTICE LEAGUE AMERICA #50)

While Superman hides on a talk show, Trimpaugh Doomsday squares off against the JLA. Guy leads the pack to take him down ("Death or cremation?"), but immediately gets his head slammed into the ground, then stomped into the ground, then punched into the ground. Sheesh, even Aftershock landed a punch.



3. GUY VS. LOBO
(JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL #71)

In the previous issue, Lobo teleported onto Guy's head and crushed Guy on the head, sending him back to his old Rambo-esque self. This ish sees the two testosterone-fueled lunkheads continuing to pound one another, but then Guy commits into a street-style melee on "Bloodsport" opponent for the League's resident psychotic bad boy.

4. GUY VS. METAMORPHO
(JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE #10)

Guy blows himself out to Steam Stogs when his old buddy Metamorpho comes looking for a fight. Sadly, Rex has been using Mercurius on cycle has his own ex-mental powers to create a formidable super-foe. Guy calls the kid ugly and stars Metamorpho around a bit. Metamorpho then turns into gold and pummels Guy into a bloody pulp.

5. GUY VS. BATMAN
(JUSTICE LEAGUE #49)

After spending all the time moping why he's back in to lead the team, Guy challenges Batman for the position. Guy takes off his ring, charges Bats and...BONK!...gets floored with one single punch [illegible] JESSE THOMPSON

SUMMER LEAGUE FUN

The Justice League expands this summer, but not in the team ranks; more like on the comic racks.

DC Comics plans on doubling up issues of *JLA* from August through October, and the expansion will be necessary, since there'll be more than enough action, intrigue and—dare we say it—love in the air for some of the Leaguers.

But before the summer blockbusters roll out, writer Joe Kelly wraps up his "White Rage" saga in May, which explores some of the newer JLAers, like ultra-powerful Faith and the time-displaced Native American shaman called Raven Manitou.

"There's a standoff the League tries to defuse peacefully, with some Waco-like separatists, but everything goes horribly wrong," explains Kelly. "It's a story about responsibility, when can the League stick their noses in things. It also introduces some new concepts and characters, like the Clockwatchers, who we'll see more of down the pike."

Then in June, a new three-part arc kicks off by Kelly and fill-in artist Duncan Rouleau (*Action Comics*) that introduces a revamp of an old villain group (DC remains mum on the details) that's coming back with a grudge against the League in a tale that Kelly describes as "a trippy kind of political story" that sees the World's Greatest Superheroes dealing with "world events, metaphorically and otherwise."

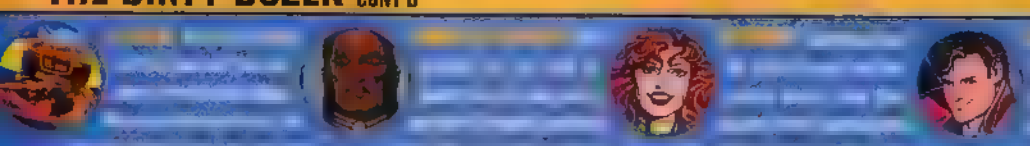
Regular series artists Doug Mahnke and Tom Nguyen return in August for the big six-part event called "Trial By Fire." A lot of elements will be touched upon in that magnum opus, including the return of some JLAers who left after "The Obsidian Age" storyline, and the introduction of a new villain who has roots within the League!

"He's very, very nasty," exclaims Kelly of this new threat. "He's hardcore, extremely badass and he's gunning for the League. They're just looking to survive against this guy."

But that's not all for "Fire," as Kelly notes, "It's going to be a big, shocking story with hardcore action and earth-shattering events. We're also going to deal with the Wonder Woman/Batman relationship that we started establishing, and now that we've got some new women on the team, we'll see some new romances as well. It's going to be a different landscape around the Watchtower by the end of the summer, and things are going to be building into something big for next year. Don't forget: *JLA* #100 is right around the corner!" ■ ANDY SERWIN

GOTTA HAVE FAITH New Leaguer Faith adds sex appeal and miraculous power to the team.

THE DIRTY DOZEN CONT'D



DREAM TEAM
THE JLA ROSTER WE WANNA SEE!

While the JLA has gotta have the DCU's big guns, grizzled veterans like Aquaman and the Martian Manhunter have run their course. We've assembled the most badass Justice League lineup of all time, with members lifted from specific eras and storylines!

WONDER WOMAN (KINGDOM COME) Who's the perfect leader for the JLA? The armor-clad, sword-wielding Wonder Woman from Mark Waid and Alex Ross' landmark 1996 *Kingdom Come* series! This Wondy is a true warrior, born and bred to kick major ass.

SUPERMAN (LOEB/McGUINNESS' SUPERMAN) When Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness took over *Superman*, they reinvigorated the character as an experienced, worldly superhero that was still all too human. The League needs Superman, and this Supes, powerful enough to slam dunk asteroids, would provide the team with a moral center.

BATMAN (GRANT MORRISON'S JLA) Batman may not be much of a team player, but he's sure as hell the brains behind this little operation. In Grant Morrison's first *JLA* storyarc, he's a freakin' NORMAL GUY who took out MARTIANS! 'Nuff said.

GREEN LANTERN ("JUSTICE LEAGUE" ANIMATED SERIES) John Stewart on "Justice League" is a former Marine, making him the no-nonsense badass in our JLA line-up. This guy's all business, and he's in the business of taking out the trash that wants to f— with his sector. Don't mess with Earth!

THE FLASH (GEOFF JOHNS' FLASH) In his own book, Flash has been transformed by writer Geoff Johns into a blue collar, professional hero who's finally moved past the Barry Allen shadow and grown accustomed to his mantle as Fastest Man Alive.

GREEN ARROW (BRAD MELTZER'S GREEN ARROW) The JLA needs a little humor now and again, and no one elicits a chuckle quite like Oliver Queen. Whether it's his womanizing, his left-leaning political beliefs or his gruff "I'm too old for this sh—" commentary, GA can still dish it out, as seen in Brad Meltzer's amazing GA run.

THE ATOM (GRANT MORRISON'S JLA) Every team needs a super-scientist, but the Atom has also proved himself as a minuscule force to be reckoned with. The Atom from "Rock of Ages" took out Darkseid by shrinking down to the size of a photon and flame broiling one of his lobes! ■ JT

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN..

'Sup.

My name's Black Vulcan. I'd happily tell you my civilian name, but them cracka-asses at ABC "forgot" to give me one. *Pfft*, whatever...

Anyway, you may remember me as the token brotha from the hit 1970s Saturday morning cartoon "Challenge of the Superfriends," where I fought the forces of evil alongside the likes of Super-honky, Bat-honky and Wonder Beeyotch whenever they needed my big-willy lightning bolts to get them out of trouble.

If I sound a little bitter about my experiences in the Hall of Justice, then I guess I'm not trying hard enough—I'm straight-up *fuming* with black rage, son!

Why you ask? For starters, you try spending the better half of a decade not only pantless, but wearing a booty-hugging leotard! Do you know what it's like fighting the Legion of Doom, getting all chaffed, and hearing that sucka Sinestro calling you "Mary Lou Retton" behind your back? I haven't been able to show my face in my old neighborhood since the Reagan era, and you don't want to know about the funk going on in my nether-regions! An' it wasn't just me either; ever notice that Apache Chief and Samurai—the other minorities—didn't get pants either? Sounds to me like another conspiracy by "The Man" to keep the brothas down!

Yo, but on the real, bein' called Mary Lou Retton really ain't that bad compared to the whack-ass super-name they gave me. I mean, please, in case you couldn't tell by my always-exposed legs, it's obvious that I'm a black man. But no, them crackas had to drive the point home by calling me Black Vulcan, just in case someone got me and Green Lantern confused. And that's another thing. What the *f*— is a *Vulcan*? Do I look like the black Leonard Nimoy or somethin'?

And yo, Aquaman, I didn't forget about you, punk-ass honky. Unless ya'll refer to each other as "boy" down in Atlantis, you better still be watchin' your Aqua-ass is all I'm sayin'. And Wonder Woman, you need to quit pagin' me; I done told your pale, boney-ass that I'm *all* about my beautiful black sistas.

But I ain't mad at ya'll. After all, I've recently been awarded "Franchise of the Month" for all of tha Tucson, Ariz., area Blockbuster Video stores. Plus, I'm *still* getting royalty checks for my cameo appearance in that special Halloween episode of "The Facts of Life" (I played the part of the "stormy night"). And these days, I've got a closet full of nothing but pants of all kinds and lengths, so don't hate the playa, hate the game.

And if you think *I've* got a lot to say, you should give Black Mamba a call sometime...

Sincerely,
Black Vulcan

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL, WILSON, COLORING BY ATOMIC PAINTBRUSH

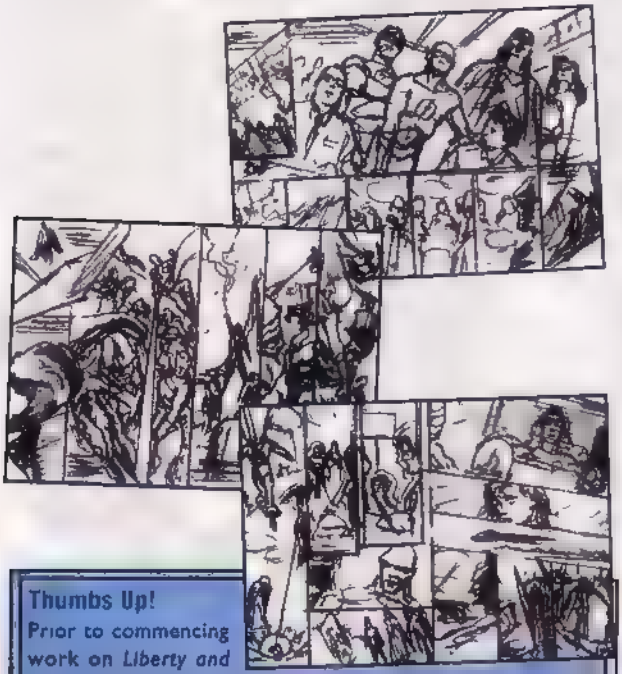
THE LIBERTY &

Wizard takes a real peek sketchbook of Alex Ross

According to superstar artist Alex Ross, supplying art for the upcoming DC epic *JLA: Liberty and Justice* has been a dream come true...literally.

"Ever since I was a teenager, I'd have dreams of illustrating an oversized, superhero epic starring the Big Seven of the Justice League," explains Ross (*Kingdom Come*). "I've actually had these fantasies about a huge book that you could sit down and read and feel as though you've been taken across the world."

And from the looks of these exclusive sketches from the November-shipping graphic novel—in which Ross once again teams up with writer Paul Dini (*JLA: Secret Origins*)—it's clear that fans are certainly in for another amazing dose of the painter's ultra-realistic take on DC's big guns. Take a look for yourself at what we're talking about, and discover what Ross has to say about his dream finally coming true. ■ CASEY SELJAS



Thumbs Up!

Prior to commencing work on *Liberty and Justice*, Ross undertook the daunting task of thumb-nailing each and every page of the 90-page epic in order to lay out the series and see how it would look once completed. Much like his finished paintings, Ross obviously doesn't cut corners with his layout process either.

"Each thumbnail is detailed to the fullest degree that I need them to be before I go ahead and start photographing my 'actors' playing their parts for reference," explains Ross. "I thumb-nailed the entire book over a four-day period. Then I wrote about 30 pages of notes, basically walking through every page and panel, describing in perfect detail what my intentions are behind every page and panel."

Back in the Day

Never one to pass up on an opportunity to infuse some classic JLA moments in a story—albeit subtly—Ross once again hopes to wow fans with a recreation of the JLA's legendary otherworldly battles (including their first skirmishes against Starro and Kanjar Ro) with this eye-popping spread. More importantly, Ross feels that this spread serves as the point where *Liberty and Justice* really kicks off.

"Initially, I start the story on these pages with the first seven Justice League members—the classic seven," says Ross.

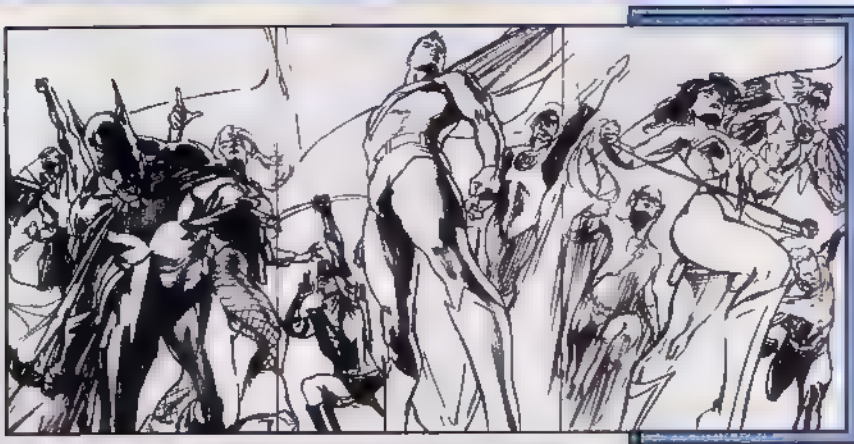
The DCU meets "The Real World"

Liberty and Justice finds the JLA's Big Seven (i.e. Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Green Lantern, Flash and Martian Manhunter) facing an alien onslaught that threatens the human race. In this panel, the JLA have just discovered the first attack of the as-yet-unknown adversary...and slowly realize that the you-know-what has just hit the fan.

Ross and Dini intend to make this story as realistic as possible, as Ross notes, "This is my attempt to do an ultra-realistic story where it seems as though the JLA are operationg in the real world with real world limitations and surroundings."

JUSTICE FILES

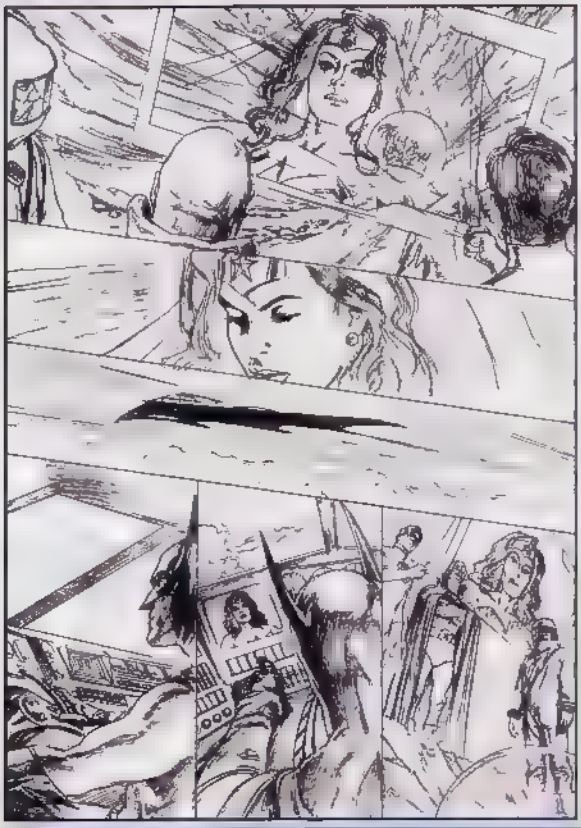
and Paul Dini's upcoming JLA epic, *Liberty and Justice*



The Second String

While the main cast of *Liberty and Justice* consists of DC's Big Seven, Ross hints that they won't be the only JLAers to show up in the epic, as is shown in these rejected *Wizard* cover sketches (and be on the lookout for two more JLA-centric *Wizard* covers, courtesy of Mr. Ross).

"By the second half of the story, we get into the next wave of Justice Leaguers, including the Atom, Green Arrow and Black Canary," says Ross. "So the truth is it'll expand beyond just the characters that are initially presented in the promo art."



JLA = Homeless?

In this scene, Ross explains that the JLA have learned that a strange meteor that landed on Earth has caused the outbreak in the Congo, and Green Lantern's power ring has proven futile in trying to figure out what exactly this virus is. Naturally, the JLA have to get to the bottom of the mysterious plague, but rather than take the meteor to the Hall of Justice or the JLA Watchtower on the moon, Batman offers up the Batcave as a base of operations.

"In *Liberty and Justice*, we acknowledge the Batcave as sort of a halfway meeting point for the Justice League to use," says Ross. "I didn't want to get into a whole Hall of Justice-type headquarters that needs to be cleaned and the whole issue of monitor duty. In the world of the JLA that I envision, they realistically are such busy people that the true adventures happen when they all have to come together."

The Big Guns

Given the fact that Ross has almost single-handedly redefined the look of the classic JLA heroes through he and Dini's series of "tabloid" comics like *Batman: War on Crime* and *Superman: Peace on Earth* as well as his series of DC Direct lithos, it's quite apparent that he draws inspiration from a number of sources—some of which are rather surprising.

"In effect, what's the real reason why I love these characters so much?" poses Ross. "In my mind, they're just the Super Friends. Why do I have Aquaman in his orange shirt? It's the way he was in 'Super Friends.'"

Yet he also has his own theories on why the team has stood the test of time. "Every guy is like a carbon copy of each other—they're all the 'Superman' of their own respective mythologies," says Ross. "You know, Aquaman is the Superman of the sea, Batman is the Superman of Gotham, and so on. So you're getting the individual Gods of each of their own domains."

Wanna know who's who in Phil Jimenez's awesome, 95-character JLA illustration to kick off this feature? Take a guess, and then go to wizarduniverse.com right now for a complete roster of every single JLA member who ever joined the team!

The BENDIS Bunch

By Mike Cotton

With a six-title workload—including three top 25 hits for Marvel—Brian Michael Bendis ranks as the most powerful creator in comics. And that's definitely much more than a hunch.

F

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Wolverine, Spider-Man, Daredevil, Christian Walker, Jessica Jones, Gwen Stacy, Beatrix Pilgrim and Mary Jane Watson. Bendis has his own cookie square.

AVON 03

Shunning the Spotlight

Usually soft-spoken—almost shy at times—Bendis hates to talk about his many accomplishments, triumphs and awards. But the most sought-after and praised writer in comics today only gets *really* angry when he's compared to another Marvel writer who once dominated sales charts.

"Don't compare me to Stan Lee," says Bendis as he paces up and down the isles of a Portland bookstore. "Really, it's not cool. I appreciate what you're trying to say, but it makes me very uncomfortable."

Even in today's market of superbly talented writers such as J. Michael Straczynski (*Amazing Spider-Man*), Jeph Loeb (*Batman*) and Mark Millar (*The Ultimates*), not one comes close to touching Bendis' total domination of fan support and sales—that is, unless you count Kevin Smith.

But while Smith's name alone guarantees a place at number one or number two on the sales chart, the writer has disappointed fans—the same fans Bendis satisfies month after month—by taking a break from comics before completing *Daredevil: The Target* and *Black Cat/Spider-Man. The Evil that Men Do*, both of which have seen over seven months pass since an issue shipped.

"I'd love to see Kevin go in and kick Brian's ass," says Jemas after a long, thoughtful pause. "Kevin doesn't write enough for us. Brian delivers hundreds of thousands of fans every month. He makes all those fans happy and brings them back. He's like nobody else in the business. The easiest thing to do is look at sales figures—consistent figures."

"Bendis is the on-deck guy," adds Bendis' good friend and *Wolverine* writer Greg Rucka, an A-list creator in his own right. "He hasn't missed once. Every time that [Marvel has] wanted him, he has come out of the dugout and he's knocked it out of the park—every time."

Even compared to a contemporary, though, Bendis still hesitates to take any glory. The writer sees his place as comics' most powerful writer more as an elected position than one bestowed upon him.

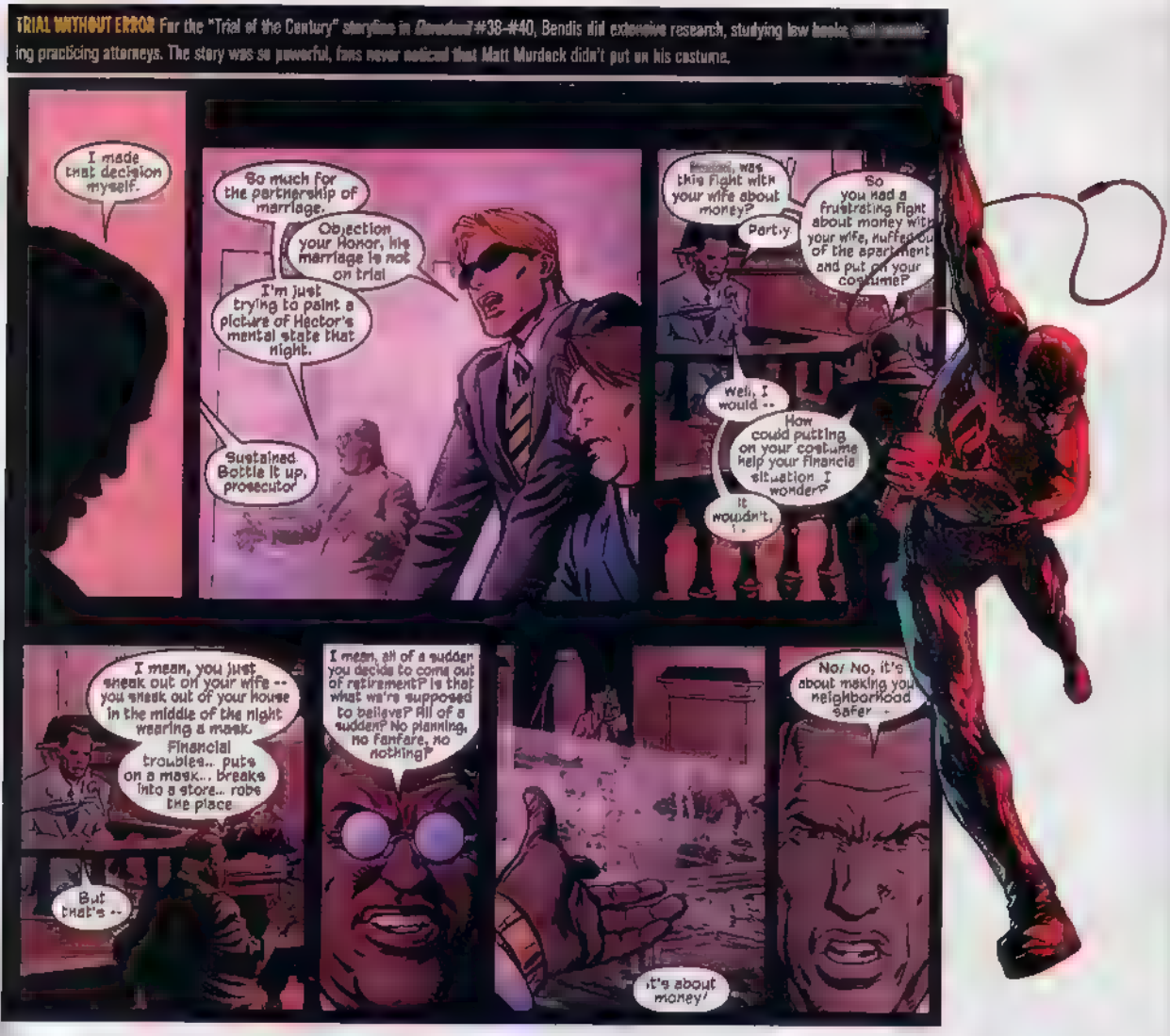
"I'm not the most powerful guy; it's the guy buying the book, because he voted," mumbles Bendis, head down as if the praise shames him. "He's the one that casts the vote on what kind of comics he wants next year. If someone says, 'I like Bendis, I like Rucka, I'm going to find their stuff.' When you buy a book with our name on it, you're casting a vote, you're saying to the publisher, 'I'm voting to see five more books like this next year.'"

Despite his denial of posessing power, the admitted shameless self-promoter concedes he does have a powerful ego when it comes to his work.

"To put your name on something and sell it to someone, you have to have an ego," divulges Bendis reluctantly. "It's all wrapped around this bacon-flavored self-loathing that I immerse myself in. I'm dying for you to read my stuff and as soon as you read it, I'm mad at myself for even showing it to you. I crave the compliment, I get it and then I'm upset."

Maybe Bendis shuns the limelight

TRIAL WITHOUT ERROR For the "Trial of the Century" storyline in *Daredevil* #38–#40, Bendis did extensive research, studying law books and consulting practicing attorneys. The story was so powerful, fans never noticed that Matt Murdock didn't put on his costume.


I made that decision myself.
So much for the partnership of marriage.
Objection your Honor, his marriage is not on trial
I'm just trying to paint a picture of Hector's mental state that night.
Sustained. Bottle it up, prosecutor
Daredevil, was this fight with your wife about money?
Party.
So you had a frustrating fight about money with your wife, huffed out of the apartment and put on your costume?
Well, I would --
How could putting on your costume help your financial situation I wonder?
It wouldn't, I --
I mean, you just sneak out on your wife -- you sneak out of your house in the middle of the night wearing a mask.
Financial troubles... puts on a mask... breaks into a store... robs the place
But that's --
I mean, all of a sudden you decide to come out of retirement? Is that what we're supposed to believe? All of a sudden? No planning, no fanfare, no nothing?
It's about money!
No! No, it's about making your neighborhood safer.

because after sputtering for 10 years in the shadows of indy comics, the heat from the spotlight is just a little too hot—even for someone who craved scorching success from the very start.

Paying Dues, Not Bills

Growing up in Cleveland 20 years ago, Bendis would have wholeheartedly welcomed the prosperity he now politely eludes.

Before *Ultimate Spider-Man* and a gig on *Daredevil*, the writer (and sometimes artist) toiled through the 1990s as an accomplished indy creator of crime fiction comics. Through publishers Caliber and later Image, Bendis wrote acclaimed crime fiction such as *A.K.A. Goldfish*, *Fire* and *Jinx*. Alas, his success didn't pay the bills. Surviving on nothing more than Ramen Noodles, Bendis did his comics on the side while working as a comic store clerk, drawing caricatures at parties or cartooning for the *Cleveland Plains Dealer*.

As Bendis' indy hits gained acclaim in the late '90s, his *Torso* mini-series—starring Eliot Ness facing off against America's first known serial killer—gained widespread acclaim and won Bendis an Eisner Award for Talent Deserving Wide Recognition in 1999.

PARKER GETS POPPED Bendis continually shocks readers by torturing his characters. He places them in roller coaster situations, such as when Spidey was shot by the police in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #29.

"The night I won the Eisner, I was so excited," says Bendis. "But that same night, I was working a bat mitzvah doing caricatures. It paid $75 an hour and it gave me enough money to work on *Jinx* all day."

Unfortunately, Bendis only made $144 on *Jinx* after it was published.

As Bendis developed his craft, he caught the eye of one of the most powerful men in comics during the '90s—*Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane.

Impressed by Bendis' witty dialogue, electrifying sense of pacing and the gritty realism the author packed into his crime fiction work, McFarlane signed Bendis to write both the horror title *Hellspawn* and the detective series *Sam & Twitch*.

At the same time, Marvel Comics' just-appointed Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada was taking notice of Bendis' talents. Trying to get the chronically late, but very successful, Marvel Knights *Daredevil* series back on track, Quesada offered the writing duties to Bendis—a chance the writer jumped at.

Soon after taking over *Daredevil* for a four-issue arc, Bendis was fired by McFarlane but a new opportunity was on the horizon—Marvel's Ultimate line.

Scare Tactics

Over the years, Bendis tipped over conventional storytelling with one piece of advice the writer says he'd love to give every writer in comics—"Get scared."

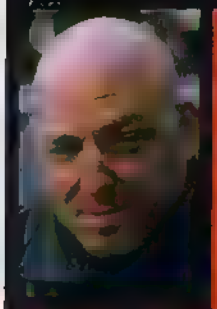
Unfortunately, even pros say Bendis' advice is only as good as the writer who listens to it.

"Brian says, 'Write yourself into a hole that you're terrified you can't get out of, do that, and then find the way out,' and if you know Brian, he says stuff like that with a glint in his eyes, almost insane," laughs Rucka. "There's a piece of me that wants to say, 'That's great advice, Brian.' But there's another part of me that wants to say, 'Not everyone can do it.' Brian has the ability to do things like no one else."

That was Marvel's exact thinking when

Know It All

Five things you didn't know about Brian Michael Bendis



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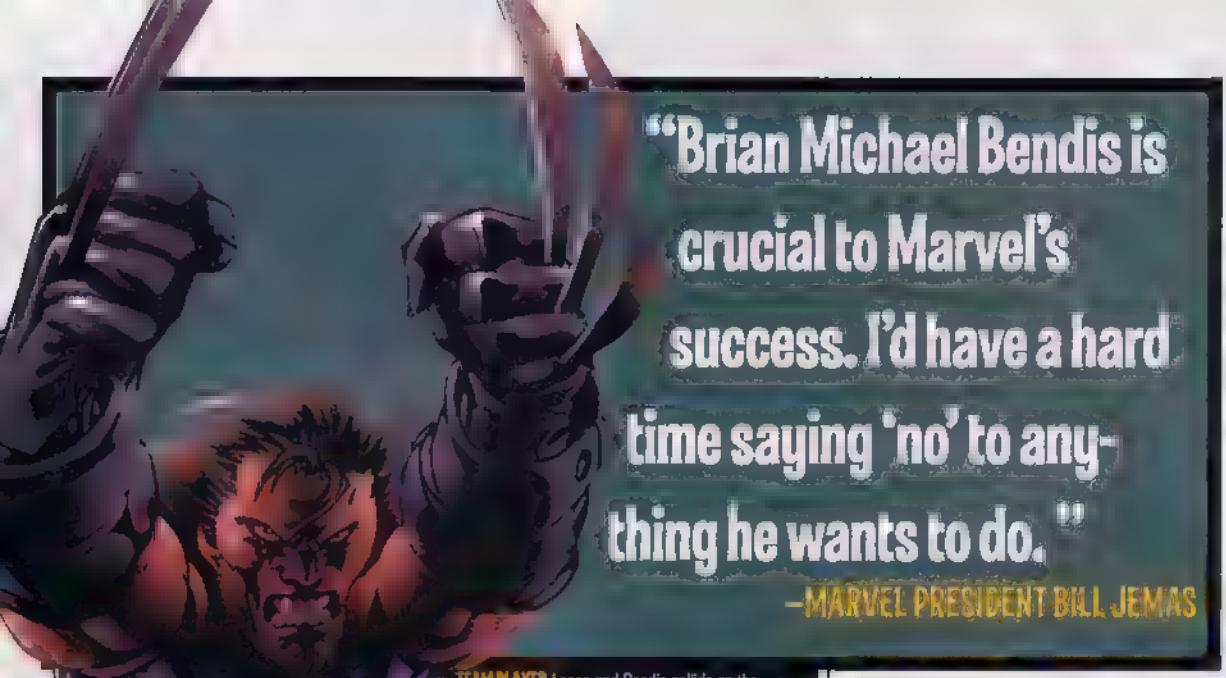


"Brian Michael Bendis is crucial to Marvel's success. I'd have a hard time saying 'no' to anything he wants to do."
—MARVEL PRESIDENT BILL JEMAS

TEAM PLAYER Logan and Bendis collide as the scribe takes over *Ultimate X-Men* for a six-month stint this June.

assembling the creative team for *Ultimate Spider-Man*

When the flagship title in Marvel's new creator-driven, back-to-basics imprint was announced, hardcore Spidey fans scoffed at the notion of rebooting the character for the 21st century, especially with a superhero novice like Bendis at the stick. However, *Ultimate Spider-Man* astonished fans because of the tight spots Bendis put his teenage hero in. The writer wrote himself into numerous holes but delivered the goods with each and every scenario.

Taking the basic concepts that Spider-Man co-creators Stan Lee and Steve Ditko laid out over 40 years prior, Bendis shaped *Ultimate Spider-Man* into a perfect jumping on point for any new comic book reader. Instead of focusing on adult problems such as marriage, bills and rent, Bendis' Spider-Man saga was a high school drama built around a realistic teenager trying to come to grips with his new powers. What happens when a 15-year-old Spider-Man gets shot through the shoulder and has to hide the wound from Aunt May? What happens when he's driven to the edge of killing a bank-robbing Spider-Man impersonator? Bendis made *Ultimate Spider-Man* a title completely devoid of continuity restraints, a title where anything could happen.

The risk paid off. Fans who initially scorned Marvel for the Ultimate books suddenly couldn't get enough of Bendis' take on a teenage Peter Parker. Fans rallied around the book, making it one of today's consistent top five sellers each month.

"He has a complete command of the art," asserts Rucka. "Every aspect of a writer's job, he can do it well, and understands it intuitively. He's got every trick in the toolbox and God, he knows how to use them."

Working almost six months ahead on his four monthly titles (which also include Marvel's *Daredevil*, *Alias* and his creator-owned [with artist Mike Avon Oeming] Image book *Powers*), Bendis maintains a grueling work ethic—an ethic that lifts him to the top of the list of the hottest writers working in comics today. In Bendis' mind, it's not important that he retains a place (or numerous places) on the Top 100 chart; it's that he cranks out the best stories he's capable of, every single month.

"I get paid whether I kick ass or phone it in," says Bendis. "Why not kick ass?"

At age 14, Bendis even went as far as trying to top the Marvel comics of his youth by re-drawing and writing some of the publisher's licensed comics.

"In high school, I actually used the Passover break to draw Marvel's 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' adaptation because I decided that Marvel had done a lackluster job," recalls Bendis. "I was going to spend the break redrawing the adaptation and send it in to them, and they'd be so taken with it that they would then republish it—they would stop publishing the one they were publishing and publish mine because mine was so much more superior."

He never finished the adaptation, though, after working on the first 40 pages and not even finishing the opening credits.

On an average day, Bendis begrudgingly forces himself out of bed after 1 p.m. and begins writing somewhere around 8 p.m., working straight until about 8 a.m. Fueled by junk food and caffeine, the scribe spends as much time researching his projects as he does writing them.

Hungry for work, Bendis could have churned out his first *Ultimate Spider-Man* scripts in one night. Instead, he visited parks and malls—everywhere teenagers hang out—and he listened, saying to Jemas, "I want to understand the new lingo. I want to understand how they speak."

A few days later, Bendis handed in the script that won him the job.

"If I research something and it only makes it into one or two panels, I'm happy," says the writer. "Even if no one else realizes it, I know it's accurate. I know I did what I had to, to make the story as believable as possible."

For a *Daredevil* story that would see Matt Murdock strictly in the courtroom and not in costume, Bendis spent weeks reading law books and even had lawyers look over the scripts for authenticity. Hell,

Bendis almost went to jail for his craft. Once, while shooting photographic reference for *Jinx* on a Cleveland bridge, the scribe was held at gunpoint by cops after someone reported seeing a man with a gun on the bridge during rush hour.

"I was handcuffed, my friend was handcuffed, we were put in two different squad cars," recalls Bendis. "After it was all over, me and my friend high-five each other, like 'Oh my God it was awesome,' you know? It was a great day. No one got hurt. I said, 'Let's see Frank Miller do that.' I had a gun to my bald head."

Of course, that's not the only gun to rest against Bendis' temple. Every month he adheres to strict deadlines—deadlines that have turned him into one of the most reliable and acclaimed creators at a company known for its lateness on hot titles.

But no matter how much fan acclaim Bendis attains or the number of offers he gets to work in Hollywood, the visionary never strays too far from comics. He sees comics—not just Marvel Comics, mind you—as the house of ideas every medium steals from.

"Every single one of those mediums runs to us," says Bendis. "And everyone in our business has someone up their ass looking for a screenplay or something. Why? Because we've got all the good stuff. It's all in here. Every movie, every TV show or movie that's coming out this summer—they're because of us. 'The Matrix'—that's us. Everyone is trying to be us."

Future Power

With everyone from comic book pros to fans to Hollywood higher-ups wooing Bendis for more work, one might think the writer would shift to a slower gear.

"Not a chance," says the new father, reclining in his basement office just after 3 a.m.

In fact, things will only get busier for Bendis over the summer. He's already written a six-part *Ultimate X-Men* arc beginning with June's issue #34 that will team the world's favorite mutants with Ultimate Spider-Man.

"It's kind of a Wolverine story," says Bendis. "It focuses on his quest for something, which makes it a little easier for me to wrap around any kind of team effort. The cool thing is that it's very Ultimate Universe-focused. The first issue, and into most of the story, guest-stars Spider-Man so much so that *Ultimate Spider-Man* fans would be remiss not to pick it up."

Having wrapped the mega-popular return of Venom storyline in *Ultimate Spider-Man*, issue #40 sees the debut of the Ultimate Universe's first all-new villain.

"It's a teenage-focused story, where Peter meets someone from another school who also has power but may not have the benefit of the upbringing that Peter had," says Bendis. "Sometimes we take for granted how serious a guy Peter is and how serious he takes his responsibilities. Most 15-year-olds would use their powers to just be a cool guy—we're going to show how powers can kind of warp a person."

Femme fatale Typhoid Mary will be resurrected in the pages of *Daredevil* and will have one of the bloodiest fights with DD ever—right on the steps of the Nelson & Murdock law firm. Also, look for the return of a former villain no one's expecting and changes so big, DD's relationship with his rogues gallery (and the Marvel Universe at large) will never be the same again.

Over in *Alias*, Bendis plans to finally reveal star detective Jessica Jones' mysterious, long-awaited origin in a story guest-starring both Spider-Man and Galactus. "You'll see what led to Jessica deciding the superhero life wasn't for her," says Bendis.

Then there's *Powers*, which Bendis keeps mum on. "There's so much going on...such big events, I don't even want to possibly ruin it," says the writer giddily. "A lot of the rules will change this summer."

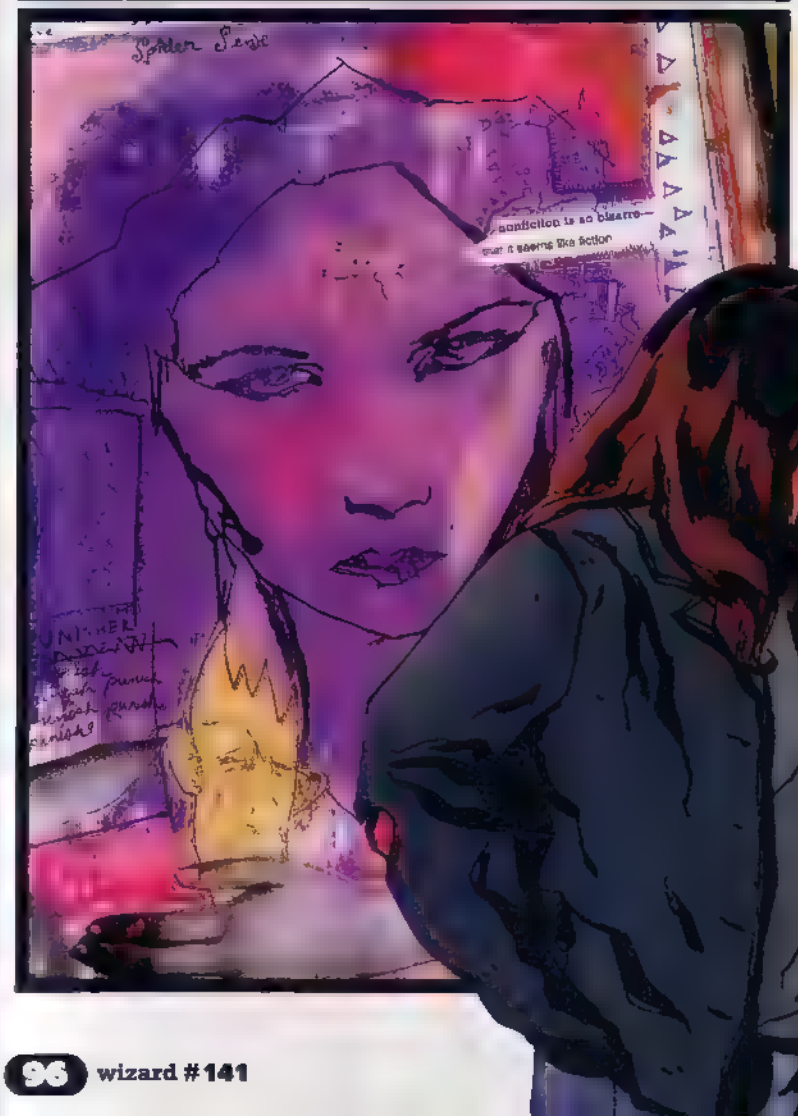
Much safer speeding behind his computer than he is behind the wheel of a car, Bendis knows a race can be won or lost by one flat tire, one bad plug...or one bad story. But with all the success he's garnered over the last few years, he won't be yielding to any red lights soon.

"I did 10 years in the trenches," says Bendis, his hands running over his freshly shaven head. "I know for a fact, if it goes away tomorrow, I'm cool. I'm just going to make comics. Hopefully, there will be enough people to buy them."

Spoken like a true man of power.

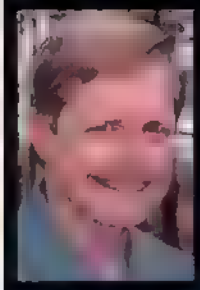
Staff writer Mike Cotton may not have any power, but he does have his own "License to Drive" a copy of the 1989 Corey Haim/Corey Feldman classic

BOOM BUDDIES Old pal David Mack provides covers for Bendis' mature-readers series *Alias*. Because of a controversial sex scene, *Alias* #1 was pulled from its Alabama printer.



Ultimate Workhorse

The other half of Marvel's 'Ultimate Spider-Man,' Mark Bagley proves he's the hardest working man in the biz!



Writer Brian Michael Bendis may get all the accolades and awards for *Ultimate Spider-Man*, but artist Mark Bagley is the glue that holds the series together.

"I work about 77 to 80 hours per week," admits the 45-year-old Atlanta resident. "But," he adds with a laugh, "my wife swears it's closer to 100!"

Bagley's grueling six-day-a-week schedule begins bright and early. While Sunday may be the day of rest, Bagley still manages to squeeze in a few hours drawing as background noise. Bagley's found what he considers the ideal working environment, and it's helped him become one of the most reliable—penciliers in comics.

"I think I average about 1.8 pages per day, two and a half [illegible]

And that groove and professionalism won't be broken for [illegible]

"I can do about a book and a half each month and still have [illegible] work starts to suffer and the lifestyle just sucks.

Bagley experienced that firsthand 10 years ago while he [illegible] and the ensuing stress and lack of exercise drove Bagley to exhaustion.

But Bagley's no stranger to the crash-course approach either, citing his personal record for most consecutive hours penciling was two books in 48 hours on Marvel's *Visionaries* in 1987.

"Hell, I was 28," he says. "I was a young kid."

Bagley's inspiration comes from two sources. First, he sees his career as a personal homage to the penciliers who came before him.

"I grew up admiring Jack Kirby, John Buscema and Gil Kane—guys I don't know how many books he did," reveals Bagley. "Part of the appeal of my work is the fact that fans can pick up *Ultimate Spider-Man* and every month it's my art. I think having the same writer, same artist and no having fill-in work or inventory stories is underestimated in this business. I don't care how good the fill-in artist is—as a fan, it's still a jarring difference."

Other sources of inspiration evolve from purely personal needs.

"I treat this like a business because I've had jobs that I've hated, and I can honestly say I love this job," says Bagley. "I'm not sure if I love it on the 70th hour of the week, but I still get up every morning and think, 'Ooh, I get to go to work' after all this time."

CASEY SEIJAS

MARATHON MAN Wanna see something amazing? Mark Bagley drew all three of these *USM* images at once!

Photo courtesy of Mark Bagley

By the WIZARD Staff

REEL WORLD

WIZARD's guide to the coolest upcoming comic-related movie projects

HULK

(Universal)

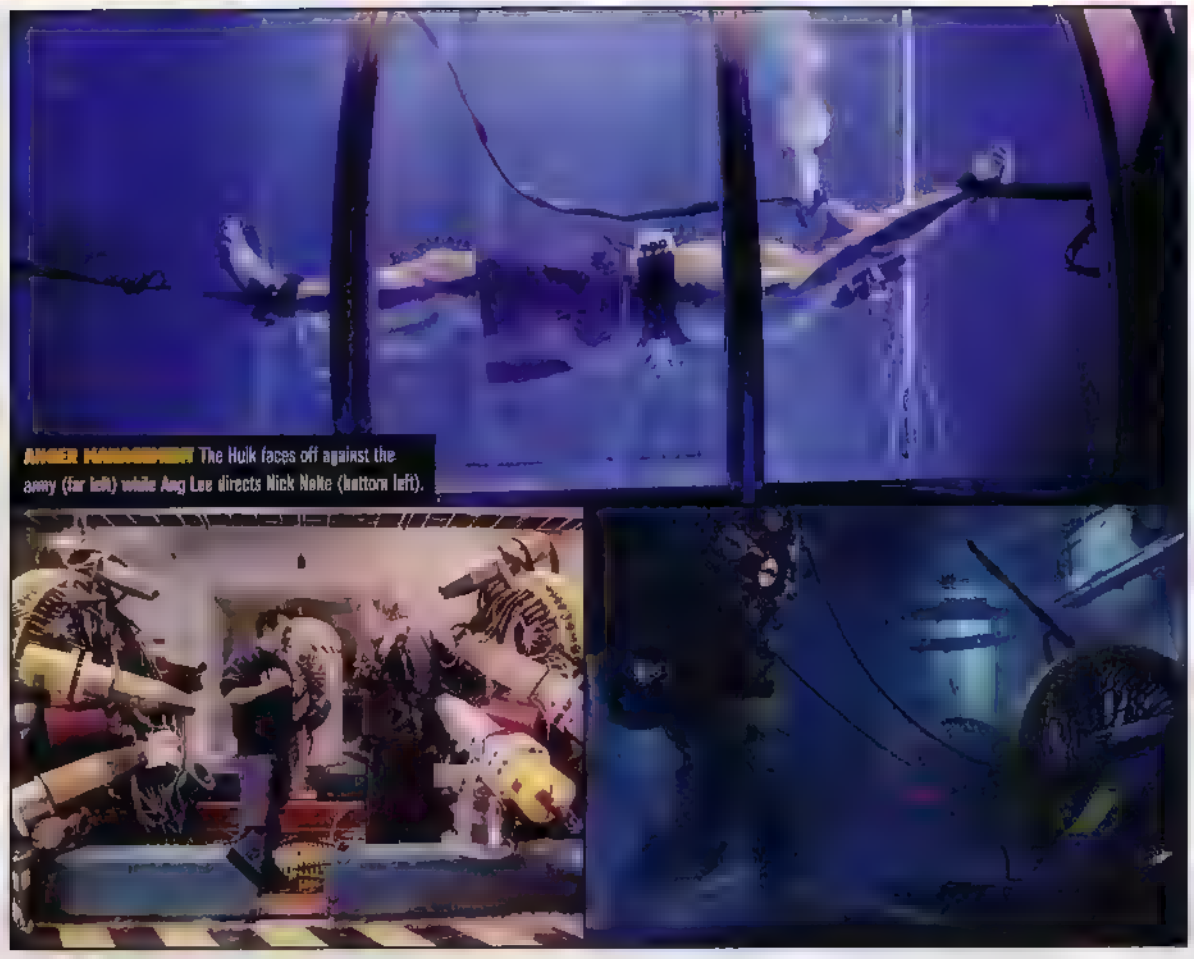
PREMISE: Dr. Bruce Banner struggles to live a normal life while besieged by horrible flashbacks, nightmares and a secret curse—a literal monster living inside him. A genetic scientist, Banner studies the effect of gamma radiation on damaged tissue, until one day after a freak accident, his inner beast is unleashed, transforming Banner into the most powerful being on Earth—the incredible Hulk!

THE SCOOP: Working on "Hulk" has gone from a way to pay the bills to a divine decree, according to director Ang Lee.

"I've been calling 'Hulk' my 'New Green Destiny,'" says Lee, referring to the mystical element of his four-time Academy Award-winning film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." "There were a lot of things that clicked—the psychodrama, the pop-culture elements, the potential artistic

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Ang Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"), Eric Bana (the Green Banner), Jennifer Connelly (Betty Ross), Sam Elliott (General Thunderbolt Ross), Nick Nolte (Bruce Banner's father), Josh Lucas (Major Glenn Talbot), Paul Kersey (security guard), producer/screenwriter James Schamus, Industrial Light + Magic (visual effects)

RELEASE DATE: June 20, 2003



ANGER MANAGEMENT The Hulk faces off against the army (far left) while Ang Lee directs Nick Nolte (bottom left).

form and the stretch from comic book to psychodrama."

Call it destiny if you'd like, but when "Hulk" hits theaters on June 20, it's undoubtedly going to pull in big numbers at the box office. Driven by the precise direction of Lee, groundbreaking CGI effects, a stellar cast of hot newcomers as well as Oscar winners, "Hulk" has become one of the most anticipated films of the summer and another surefire blockbuster for Marvel Films.

Plagued by rumors of a lackluster script and skeptical fans who felt the up-and-coming Bana ("Black Hawk Down") couldn't pull off the role of Bruce Banner, it seemed as though "Hulk" had two strikes against it from the get-go. However, after the debut of the CGI Hulk in action during this year's Super Bowl commercial, critical fans are now singing a different tune. Yet Marvel Studios Senior Vice President Kevin Feige promises a diesel-looking Hulk tossing around tanks isn't all that will wow both comic and mainstream fans.

"I think they're going to be impressed with the tone of the movie, I think they're going to be impressed with the deep psychological element that Ang has been able to lift off the comic page, and I think they'll be surprised at how emotionally strong it is," says Feige. "And of course, they'll be impressed with the Hulk as they've never seen him. There's no green paint involved with this guy!"

Currently in the final stages of post-production, Lee has been spending most of his days at Industrial Light + Magic, adding the trademark small-yet-vital touches (on one day of filming, Lee spent two hours explaining to Bana how Bruce Banner would eat a chicken wing) that have given him a reputation as one of the most thorough directors in Hollywood. Despite possessing one of the most unique directing résumés in Hollywood (from cutting-edge kung-fu films like "Crouching Tiger" to arthouse dramas like "The Ice Storm"), Lee readily admits that working on "Hulk" has been quite the learning experience.

"It took months to figure out how this would work," says Lee. "I'm the director, so I had to take the lead right away, but at the same time I had no experience with this type of movie. I've been very appreciative of ILM's help and patience. I had to learn their routine, and they had to accommodate me and the learning process."

More than a special effects spectacular, Lee envisioned "Hulk" to be a psychological thriller, blending the worlds of action with a gritty story that's guaranteed to captivate moviegoers.

"There are a lot of characters in comic books that feel they're cursed with the powers they have," says producer Gale Ann Hurd, "but the Hulk is unique in that Bruce Banner is not in control. Banner, when he transforms into the Hulk, is fighting that change. The Hulk is really the id written large, and in no way is he—in terms of the characterization we have in our film—out saving the day, fighting evil. In fact, throughout most of the film, he's on the run."

"There's really no difference to me," says Lee. "I'm a very savvy director [laughs]. I feel it's necessary to combine and incor-

MR. WIZARD Careful what you mix there, Bruce; it could make you big, green and surly.

porate the two elements in every scene. Both the story and the character have to be related somehow."

With the premiere just weeks away, rumors have already swirled about a possible sequel. While Marvel Films offers no official comment, they are prepared for the best.

"It's never too early to start talking about sequels in terms of what other characters, what other storylines we want to tell that have been told in the books," says Feige. "I've got the best job in the world in that I've got 40 years of stories that I can sift through. When we were looking for a storyline for the first movie, we inevitably came across things that would be great for a second or third movie, should that happen."

DID YOU KNOW: While Lee hopes that fans won't disregard "Hulk" as "just another comic movie," based on the thriller-esque script, one thing's for sure—the Hulk himself will set new standards in terms of CGI.

Lee took a decisively hands-on approach to the CGI portion of the film, and given his knack for bring out the best in actors emotionally, ILM had to make some interesting adjustments to fit Lee's vision. In other words, software for Lee's vision of the "Hulk" didn't exist, but rather than give up, ILM simply took a logical approach.

"There's software that's been invented solely for this film," relates Feige. "And Ang, who comes off of 'Eat Drink Man Woman,' 'The Ice Storm' and 'Crouching Tiger,' has always dealt with performances. The way he is directing a performance out of a computer and through the animators I think will probably be the most impressive thing about the movie."

Universal and Marvel Films already know that they've set a new standard for computer animation.

"Every four or five years, a film comes out that raises the bar technically, whether that be 'Star Wars,' or one of the Indiana Jones movies when we were growing up, or 'T2,' 'Jurassic Park,'" says Feige. "The Hulk will raise it even higher when it comes to living, breathing, soulful CG characters." ■ **CASEY SEIJAS**

GREEN MACHINE

WIZARD SITS DOWN FOR AN EXCLUSIVE Q&A WITH ANG LEE, WHO WORKED TRIPLE OVERTIME ON 'HULK' AND LIVED TO TELL ABOUT IT

Although "Hulk" has almost capped its production transformation from idea into finished film, Ang Lee's workload hasn't gotten any lighter. "I just started the music process—the score—and we're just about there," says an exhausted Lee. "We're shooting the last two shots tomorrow. Lately I've been spending one-half to two-thirds of the day at ILM."

Despite the long hours, Lee managed to find time to sit down with Wizard to answer the burning questions that have plagued comic fans since "Hulk" was announced. Read on and find out why he feels he's smarter than a computer, how Bruce Banner's not a loser, and why he doesn't have any plans to buy a Christmas tree this year.

WIZARD: Now that you're in the final stages of filming, what's the experience been like directing your first big budget summer movie?

ANG LEE: In an odd way, it's no different from my first film. I've been fortunate that Universal's given me lots of creative freedom. I've also learned the computer is not as smart as I thought it was. You can only do so much by pushing buttons; I still have to add personal touches myself. The main difference has been the attention "Hulk" is getting from the Internet, TV, magazines and merchandise. I try not to be bothered by what comic fans and TV shows are saying. I really focused on having my own take on the Hulk without taking too much away from the comic. I've tried to have a blast, it's been very exciting. Now that we're in post-production, I'm having to direct the most expensive actor in the film—the CGI Hulk. I've tried to keep a young mind.

Did you imagine "Hulk" to be a "comic book movie" like "Spider-Man" and "X-Men," or did you see this as something completely different?

I wouldn't say it's completely different. I will say it's quite different, though. I made a point not to use any other movie as a role model for "Hulk." "Hulk" will be my take on a comic book movie. It was interesting, at first I didn't quite grasp the transfer from comic drawings to a motion picture, but I think the end result will be something unique from other comic book movies.

What kind of research did you do prior to filming? Did you read any comics?

I didn't read the comics. Pretty much all I knew of the Hulk was from the television series, and even that I didn't take too much from, other than the classic, "You won't like me when I'm angry" line. Basically, I studied the genesis of the Hulk. I studied the comic book art form, which I think is one of the best American art forms. I researched the early Eastern European character drawings, the early pulp art, fine art. Once I got my hands on that, I knew how to make it into a motion picture.

Did you make any changes to the character in order for him to translate better to the big screen?

Somewhat. I mostly focused on Bruce Banner, though. In the comic, it seems like no one cares about Bruce Banner, everyone's just waiting for the Hulk to appear and smash things and destroy things. So I felt I had to make Bruce Banner more interesting, not just a wimpy, loser character. I made Bruce Banner more of a scientist, made his purpose more believable and made him likeable, but at the same time he has the Hulk aspect carried with him. He's constantly resisting that, and constantly trying to keep that in recession.

How difficult was it to work with a CGI character who just so happens to be the star of the film?

Very. I didn't want to cartoonize him. For example, not only do I want people to watch and enjoy his power and rage, but I also want people to look at him and care for him. I had to treat him like a real actor, and at times, I got over-analytical. I couldn't have him overact with his rage and emotions. But the good thing about him was he doesn't get upset, talk back or offer feedback.

What were your initial impressions of the actors involved?

Eric [Bana] has an innocence. He's a fresh, young actor. Yet I could see the Hulk in him, especially when I saw him in "Chopper." Jennifer [Connelly] is just gorgeous, and an incredible actor. The most brilliant actor I worked with was Nick Nolte. He was amazing; you really learned to hate him as Bruce Banner's abusive father figure. Sam Elliot, who plays General Ross, was also an amazing talent. I actually hand-picked these actors to play in this film. At first it took a little convincing with the Universal people, but after they saw the screen tests and saw what I saw in them, they said, "Oh, okay."

Rumor has it Stan Lee won't be making a cameo in "Hulk."

He's in it. We just shot his scene last week. He has a very close encounter with the Hulk [laughs]. He was wonderful to work with.

With "Hulk" being labeled a psychological thriller, will the kids stay interested?

My goal is to make a movie that can be enjoyed by people of any age, especially kids. However, as a director, I can't worry too much about that. But yes, there will be enough in the picture that will captivate kids and adults alike.

Why do you feel the Hulk's stood the test of time?

I see him as a mixture of monster and superhero. He's one of the first tragic heroes. He's much more than a meathead with muscles. The Hulk is truthful. He's the truth that's hiding in all of us and is a reflection of our rage that we try to repress.

If a "Hulk" sequel were to come around, would you do it?

I'll have to think about it over the summer. There are so many new projects that are being developed that I'm interested in, especially knowing what I've learned from the Hulk. I'd need a good story first. But I'm getting very tired of the Hulk. I've been working on it for two years, it's been long days, very exhaustive. But we'll see how I feel after this summer.

Are you sick of the color green yet?

Yeah [*Laughs*]. I think I'm going to go crazy when I'm looking for a Christmas tree next Christmas [laughs]! Pretty soon, I'm going to start seeing green everywhere! ■ CS

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

(20th Century Fox)

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Stephen Norrington ("Blade"), Sean Connery (Alan Quatermain), Shane West (Tom Sawyer), Peta Wilson (Mina Harker), Naseeruddin Shah (Nemo), Tony Curran (Invisible Man), Jason Flemyng (Henry Jekyll/Hyde), Stuart Townsend (Dorian Gray)

RELEASE DATE: July 11, 2003

PREMISE: Based on Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's epic Wildstorm/ABC mini-series, "League" follows a cast of characters from classic literature, including Jekyll and Hyde, the Invisible Man and Tom Sawyer, among others. Set in the Victorian Era, the story finds the team on an adventure to stop the evil Fantom.

THE SCOOP: An unexpected name change nearly occurred with this July's "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" feature film. It nearly became a *literal* adaptation for another "League" book—namely, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

In mid-August 2002, the city of Prague in the Czech Republic suffered a massive flash flood. The cast, crew and massive set of "League," located in a field that once housed jumbo jets, felt the aftershocks of the natural disaster.

"I got home and there were houses, trucks, beds—all kinds of things floating down the river," says Peta Wilson ("La Femme Nikita"), who plays Mina Harker. "It was very sad, all these people's lives drifting away."

Despite the exhaustive "catching up" process and a serious "prune hand" epidemic, the cast and crew persevered. The result: "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," starring Sean Connery and directed by "Blade" helmer Stephen Norrington, charges into theaters July 11. Fans of the mini-series are in for a roller coaster adventure on par with the "Indiana Jones" trilogy as the classic literature characters of the League face the dastardly Fantom, a villain with intentions to kick off a world war. Given Norrington's background in special effects, expect to see some of the most groundbreaking non-CGI effects to grace the silver screen in years. (Just wait until you see a crazed Hyde bounding across the rooftops of turn-of-the-century London!)

With "League" currently in the final stages of production, both the cast and crew promise fans won't be disappointed. In fact, several cast members are already talking "sequel."

"Most of us have already signed a sequel deal," says Shane West ("A Walk to Remember"), who plays Tom Sawyer. "I'm definitely interested. I can't give too much away, but Sawyer becomes much more significant at the end of the film."

DID YOU KNOW: Although "League" promises to be a special effects extravaganza, the make-up and mechanics of Hyde will undoubtedly steal the show.

Jason Flemyng ("From Hell"), who plays Dr. Henry Jekyll and his beastly counterpart Hyde, must endure a seven-hour make-up process in order to transform into the brutal alter ego. However, the process has taught him the art of patience, as well as upping his video game-playing skills.

"I've been playing all of those politically incorrect games they have for PlayStation 2," laughs Flemyng. "For the past 11 weeks, I've been blasting Germans." ■ CS

BIG LEAGUES As Alan Quatermain, Sean Connery (far left) leads the Invisible Man, Tom Sawyer and the vampiric Mina Harker.

©FOX Photos. Twentieth Century Fox.

SPIDER-MAN 2

(Sony Pictures)

Major Players: Director Sam Raimi ("Spider-Man"); Tobey Maguire (Peter Parker/Spider-Man); Kirsten Dunst (Mary Jane Watson); Alfred Molina (Otto Octavius/Dr. Octopus); James Franco (Harry Osborn); J.K. Simmons (J. Jonah Jameson); screenwriters Alfred Gough and Miles Millar ("Smallville") and Michael Chabon (*The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*)

Release Date: July 2004

Premise: Bitten by a radioactive spider that endowed him with the speed, strength, agility and webs of an arachnid, Peter Parker learned that with great power comes great responsibility when his Uncle Ben was murdered. Donning a costume, Parker became the amazing Spider-Man to save every innocent life he can. After entering college Parker must take on his newest foe, the sinister Doctor Octopus.

The Scoop: According to Marvel Studios President and "Spider-Man" Executive Producer Avi Arad, while the highly anticipated sequel was originally titled "The Amazing Spider-Man," that title has been shelved.

"The more we thought about it, that title sounded too much like a cartoon," says Arad. "We're trying to become more sophisticated, for better or worse."

And "Spider-Man: The Sequel" (as Arad calls it) aims to take comic book films to the next level. With an expected budget of over $100 million, the return of the entire principal cast (aside from Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin) and a fan-favorite villain in Doctor Octopus, played by Alfred Molina ("Magnolia"), "Spider-Man 2" is poised to eclipse even its predecessor's $1 billion-plus worldwide gross.

OCK SHOCK Alfred Molina (top right) will test out his tentacles in next summer's "Spider-Man 2."

"This will be so amazing in terms of special effects," gushes Arad. "Just close your eyes and think of Doc Ock and ask yourself, 'What can one do with that?' It will even surpass what fans expect."

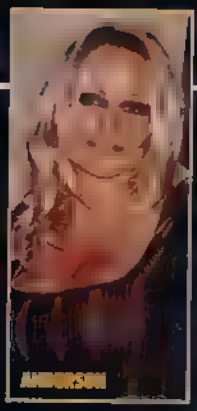
While special effects will be a necessity for the Spidey/Doc Ock battle sequences, director Sam Raimi has stressed that he wants upcoming Ock-ster Alfred Molina to use actual mechanical tentacles whenever possible. It remains to be seen how much Tobey Maguire will be slung around as Spidey; production on the film was reportedly delayed after Maguire was rumored to be suffering from a bad back as a result of his jockey turn in "Seabiscuit." But have no fear, Spidey-fans; the actor's already back in the costume.

Did you know: Don't be surprised if Maguire isn't the only actor donning the Spider-Man costume in May 2004's "Spider-Man" sequel. According to rumors, one scene in the final script has J.K. Simmons' (Vern Schillinger from HBO's "Oz") J. Jonah Jameson donning a Spider-Man costume as well! ■ **MIKE COTTON**

Molina photo: Everett Collection; Spider-Man: Sony Pictures.

STRIP TEASE

'STRIPPERELLA' HEADLINES NEW TNN ANIMATION BLOCK



Sex, humor and plenty o' action.

That's the formula behind "Stripperella," the animated series brought to titillating life on TNN by the former "Baywatch" bombshell and legendary Marvel co-founder Stan Lee. "Stripperella" will headline the men's network's edgy new adult animation block set to debut this summer, with a line-up that also includes Kelsey Grammer's "Gary the Rat" and brand-new episodes of John Kricfalusi's classic "The Ren & Stimpy Show."

Anderson lends her voice and her body (via Nickelodeon's high-tech motion-capture technology) to the voluptuous Stripperella, an exotic dancer with a heart of gold. The tagline says it all: "Stripper by night, superhero by later that night!"

But don't get *too* hot and bothered, fanboys. Stripperella won't be flashing anything that can't be seen on network TV. Instead, the show will draw its humor from clever puns and suggestive double entendres. Humanoids Publishing will even release a *Stripperella* one-shot on June 11 written by none other than Stan Lee!

Feast your eyes on the following Q&A, as Kid Rock's main squeeze answers our probing questions.

WIZARD: How did you become involved with "Stripperella"?

ANDERSON: There is a love fest between Stan Lee and myself. We've always been fans of each other! We got together and brainstormed, and Stripperella was born. She's the child of our collective labors—and funny that she looks a lot like me!

Are you involved in the show's writing process?

Yes, I give notes on the scripts. What I really love about the show is its quirky humor—like innuendoes and double entendres. It's right up my alley, so to speak!

So are you happy with your animated self?

Of course! My wish fulfilled: bigger boobs, smaller waist. How can a girl complain about that? *(Laughs)* I joke that now I can stay at home and eat cookies while my alter ego lives on and never grows old or fat.

What's the deal with your character? Who does Stripperella fight?

I'm fighting crime! I'm a stripper at night and a superhero later at night—with all that entails. Use your imagination!

Action, humor, sex appeal: Which will be stressed the most in "Stripperella"?

Duh!!! All of the above. ■ **RICHARD HO**

BATMAN

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Christopher Nolan ("Memento"), screenwriter David Goyer ("Blade I & II")

RELEASE DATE: To be determined

PREMISE: After his parents are gunned down in front of him, a young Bruce Wayne vows to avenge their deaths and rid Gotham City of crime. Outfitted in a dark cape and cowl and armed with an arsenal of high-tech gadgets and the mind of a cunning detective, Wayne now strikes fear into the hearts of criminals everywhere as the Caped Crusader—Batman.

THE LOWDOWN: This past January, Warner Bros. announced that director Chris Nolan had signed on to direct the next installment of the "Batman" film franchise.

"I grew up with Batman and I'm excited to contribute to the lore surrounding the character," Nolan recently said in published reports. "He is the most credible and realistic of the superheroes—and has the most complex human psychology."

DID YOU KNOW: In terms of the next Batman film, the question isn't, "When will it hit theaters?" but rather, "*Which* Batman film will hit theaters *first*?" Rumor has it that no less than three Batman films are currently in the works at Warner Bros. Nolan's "Batman" film currently leads the pack to land in theaters first (curiously, "Batman: The Frightening" has been registered as a WB domain), but a proposed "Batman vs. Superman" film continues to pop up in rumor mills, as well as the big screen adaptation of Frank Miller's "Batman: Year One" tale (with "Requiem for a Dream" director Darren Aronofsky pegged to direct).

BLADE III

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director/screenwriter David Goyer ("Blade I & II"), Wesley Snipes (Blade), Kris Kristofferson (Whistler).

RELEASE DATE: August 2004

PREMISE: Born just after a vampire bit his mother, Blade is the Daywalker, a unique blend of man and vampire that has all of a vampire's powers but none of the species' weaknesses. Blade returns in the final act of the trilogy and teams with other vampire hunters to take on an all-new vampire foe.

THE LOWDOWN: Reportedly, this will be Snipes' last "Blade" film. According to Goyer, who wrote the two previous "Blade" films, the new film will wrap up the "Blade" trilogy.

"It's got a little more humor," says Goyer, who just finished his first draft of the final tale. "We're introducing some new characters, some new vampire hunters that Blade aligns himself with. They're loosely based on the Nightstalkers from the Marvel comics. Hannibal King, of course, will be one of them."

The vampires in "Blade III" will be preparing for a "final solution" for humans at the same time that Blade and the Nightstalkers are plotting to wipe vampires off the face of the Earth once and for all.

SNIPES HUNT Blade will team with new characters based off Marvel's Nightstalkers in "Blade III."

DID YOU KNOW: Originally, Goyer and New Line talked about basing "Blade III" on Richard Matheson's classic tale of the last man on Earth fighting a horde of vampires, *I am Legend*. According to Goyer, the production decided to stray from a story placed in the distant future for the current tale.

CATWOMAN

MAJOR PLAYERS: Owen Wilson (Detective Tom Lone)

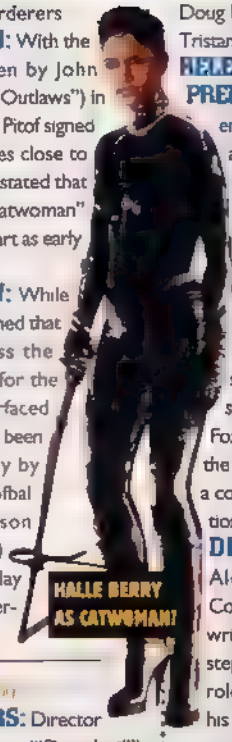
RELEASE DATE: Late 2004

PREMISE: After a misunderstanding leads to her assumed death, Patience Price manages to cash in one of her nine lives and return as Catwoman. Now she's back on the streets of Gotham City, ready to settle the

score with her murderers

THE LOWDOWN: With the final script written by John Rogers ("American Outlaws") in and French director Pitof signed on to direct, sources close to Warner Bros. have stated that production on a "Catwoman" feature film could start as early as this fall.

DID YOU KNOW: While early rumblings claimed that Ashley Judd ("Kiss the Girls") was a lock for the lead role, news surfaced that Halle Berry has been purrr-sued heavily by Warner Bros. Goofball actor Owen Wilson ("Shanghai Knights") has signed on to play investigator/love interest Tom Lone.



ELEKTRA

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Mark Steven Johnson ("Daredevil"), Jennifer Garner (Elektra)

RELEASE DATE: 2003

PREMISE: Appearing first in "Daredevil," Elektra was combat-trained her entire life at her father's behest, but saw her father murdered by Bullseye, one of the Kingpin of crime's assassins. Slain by Bullseye as well, Elektra returns from the grave seeking revenge.

THE LOWDOWN: The $100 million box office take of "Daredevil" has pretty much guaranteed this spin-off as a go. Rumors persist that the Elektra solo film will at least incorporate elements from Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz's *Elektra: Assassin* graphic novel, which saw Elektra rise from the grave and train as a ninja.

"Elektra is such a dark character," Garner said in published reports. "She just gets darker and darker. I mean, the chick visits her own grave—it's not normal."

DID YOU KNOW: Like so many fanboys, even Garner would like to see a X-Men/Daredevil crossover in the future. "Elektra and Wolverine are so interesting," Garner has said, "[as well as] Elektra and the Order of the Hand, when she became a ninja."

FANTASTIC FOUR

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Peyton Reed ("Bring It On"), screenwriters Doug Petrie ("Angel") and newcomer Tristan Patterson

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: Testing a new rocket, scientist Reed Richards, his best friend and pilot Ben Grimm, Richards' girlfriend Sue Storm and Sue's kid brother Johnny crash-land after being showered in cosmic rays. They find they've each developed a unique superpower and band together to thwart evil.

THE LOWDOWN: With a special effects budget in the stratosphere, rumor has it that Fox execs are squeamish to go with the current script and are asking for a complete overhaul of the production before it's approved for filming.

DID YOU KNOW: "Home Alone" director Christopher Columbus was originally tapped to write and direct "FF", but now has stepped back to just a producing role after budget concerns killed his shot at the project.

FATHOM

MAJOR PLAYERS: Linda Woolverton (screenwriter)

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: A young girl named Aspen Matthews is discovered on a boat that reappears after a 15-year absence, with no memory of her prior life. Aspen loves the water, and she goes on to become an Olympic swimmer and a marine biologist. The sudden development of incredible water-based powers sends Aspen on an underwater journey of discovery and adventure.

THE LOWDOWN: James Cameron's Lightstorm Productions is co-producing the film along with 20th Century Fox. Cameron was supposedly inspired by a panel in *Fathom* #1 in which Aspen wakes up alone on the boat and faces the challenge of the unknown.

"Linda Woolverton and I met and talked for like three hours about all the ideas," says Fathom creator Mike Turner. "I told her all the secrets that the comic book hasn't told yet, and she wants to make something really, really cool! Something that's big and lush and global."

DID YOU KNOW: "Fathom" was originally being developed as an animated feature at Fox Animation but

ANIMAZING!

UPDATES ON THE COOLEST 'TOONS

Flip your television to Fox, Kids' WB! or Cartoon Network and you'll find a kickass collection of animated adventures based on your favorite comic book characters. And with hits like "Justice League" (see the animated JLA sidebar on p. 100) and "X-Men: Evolution" leading the charge, we can't wait to see the all-new "Teen Titans" and "Spider-Man" series!

Here's an update on where all of your favorite super toons stand.

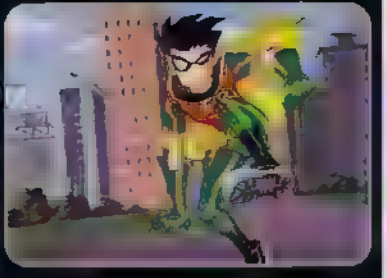
BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

This fall, Sandy Frank Entertainment will air "Battle of the Planets" on North American television for the first time in 15 years! The original "Gatt" series drew from the first 85 episodes of the original 105-episode run of "Gatchaman" in Japan. The new series (tentatively slated to be 52 half-hour episodes) is being produced in Canada by Ocean Productions and will draw from all 105 original "Gatchaman" episodes. Look for the show to be updated for today's audience, with new scripts, voices, music and special effects.

SPIDER-MAN

Spider-sense...definitely tingling! MTV is targeting a summer debut for the latest animated adventures of Spider-Man. The voice actors (including "Boogie Nights, M.D." alum Neil Patrick Harris as Peter Parker/Spidey and singer Lisa Loeb as Mary Jane) have wrapped recording, and the animators and producers are working feverishly to get things ready for Spidey's MTV debut this summer.

TEEN TITANS



Cartoon Network is gearing up to bring you the animated adventures of DC's youngest super-powered team. "Teen Titans" stars Robin, Cyborg, Beast Boy, Starfire and Raven as they band together to form the next generation of DC's superheroes. Produced by Warner Bros. Animation, the series debuts on Cartoon Network this August.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

In upcoming episodes of this Fox Box hit based off of the classic Mirage series, the Turtles—Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Donatello—befriend a group of mutants, only to find them mysteriously disappearing. And what happens when one of the green teens is brainwashed by the dreaded Shredder? Can the Turtles rescue their brother?

X-MEN: EVOLUTION

Fans have waited nearly six months for the conclusion to Season Three—but the last four episodes, scheduled to air on Kids WB! in May, will definitely be worth the anticipation! By the time the dust clears, Apocalypse will be walking the earth, which should make for some interesting drama throughout the nine new episodes of Season Four. Omega Red will show up, and popular characters like Gambit and Colossus will get more airtime. We'll see more about Xavier's past and of course, Apocalypse will be the center of attention, culminating in a two-part finale that might just be the swan song for the series. The producers are hoping for a fifth season, but just in case, they're holdin' all the marbles in Season Four! "X-Men: Evolution" is shooting for a fall debut. In the meantime, flip over to Cartoon Network, which just acquired the first three seasons of the show—all 43 episodes! ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

BAND OF CLONES

THE CREATOR OF 'SAMURAI JACK' SENDS IN THE CLONES WITH A NEW SERIES OF ANIMATED SHORTS FOR CARTOON NETWORK

"Samurai Jack" creator Genndy Tartakovsky has set his sights on a galaxy far, far away.

Launching in unison with a new toyline from Hasbro in 2004, Tartakovsky's directing and producing a lineup of 20 animated shorts—each two to three minutes in length—imbued with the intensity and turmoil surrounding the Clone Wars. "With the comics that Lucasfilm [and Dark Horse] are publishing, everybody's telling stories from the Clone Wars," explains Tartakovsky, a long-time "Star Wars" aficionado. "I thought of 'Band of Brothers.' It's kind of the whole thing that happened around D-Day. But for us, it's the Battle of Geonosis."

But even with the major creative forces behind "Samurai Jack" working on the series, Tartakovsky is quick to knock comparisons of "Star Wars: Clone Wars" to his lonesome, katana-wielding opus. "Visually, it's going to be completely different than 'Jack,' but still following the same kind of principles using cinema, making the backgrounds a character, [and] having a lot of strength and mood and atmosphere."

Yet with a maximum of three minutes to seduce fans, how can the story possibly prevail? Tartakovsky has no doubts, promising that there are "huge amounts of action, but everything is still supporting all the things that have been set up by the movies. So we still have Anakin's angst and his problems, and his relationship with Obi Wan. Then we have some stuff with [Count] Dooku. If you took all of them, put 'em together and projected them in a movie theater, it'd feel like a multi-million-dollar feature."

Along with familiar mainstays Anakin, Obi-Wan and Yoda, the episodes will set the stage for Asajj Ventress, a deadly female Dark Jedi armed with a duel-lightsaber sent to assassinate the teenage Darth Vader.

Tentatively scheduled to air consecutively on Cartoon Network starting in late 2003 through 2004 at a rate of one per day, "Clone Wars" will essentially bridge the gap between "Episode II" and "Episode III." And as Tartakovsky assures, "We get to see Jedi use their powers a lot, too." ■ JOHN M. GIBSON

has since been re-envisioned as a live-action film.

GHOST RIDER [illegible]

MAJOR PLAYERS: Screenwriters David Goyer ("Blade") and Shane Salerno ("Shaft")

RELEASE DATE: 2004

PREMISE: On a late-night drive through the desert with his girlfriend, Johnny Blaze's car overturns, killing his lover. Feeling the accident was his fault, Blaze begs to God for her return. Answering his call is a Native American deity who promises to return Blaze's girlfriend to life if the young man will bond with the Ghost Rider, a dark figure set upon Earth to punish the guilty.

THE LOWDOWN: Reportedly Nicolas Cage ("Adaptation") and Kiefer Sutherland ("24") are in negotiations to play the part of Blaze, who realizes his girlfriend is alive but in a coma. Seeking out the human form of the deity that fooled him, Blaze plots out a plan to use the Ghost Rider to put things right.

DID YOU KNOW: Recently moved to Sony Productions, the first pass of the script was well received by execs and reportedly on the fast track at the studio.

HELLBOY [illegible]

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Guillermo del Toro ("Blade 2"), Ron Perlman (Hellboy), Selma Blair (Liz Sherman), John Hurt (Dr. Broom), Doug Jones (Abe Sapien), Mike Mignola (conceptual designs)

RELEASE DATE: Summer 2004

PREMISE: A creature born in the flames of hell and brought to our world in a pagan ritual, Hellboy faithfully serves as a member of the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense, guarding the world from otherworldly menaces.

THE LOWDOWN: Filming recently commenced in Prague and del Toro plans to take only 20 weeks to finish shooting. Representatives from Revolution Studios (producers of "Hellboy") are optimistic about the quick filming process and the final outcome. "Hellboy has an amazing following and we are thrilled to be bringing it to the screen," says Revolution Studios head Lawrence Gordon. "Guillermo has wanted to make this film for a long time, and we are confident that his vision will remain true to the dark and sophisticated tone that fans have come to expect."

DID YOU KNOW: Fans can expect to see groundbreaking special effects when "Hellboy" hits theaters next summer—and lots of them! Special effects masters Tippet Studios (who also supply SFX for "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen") have over 100 CGI shots already finished.

IRON MAN [illegible]

MAJOR PLAYERS Screenwriters Miles Millar and Alfred Gough ("Smallville")

RELEASE DATE: TBD

SEE YOU IN HELL Believe it or not, Hellboy is smiling; his movie will be released next summer!

PREMISE: Industrialist and billionaire Tony Stark develops the next step in weaponry with his exoskeleton body armor, complete with repulsor rays, boot jets and tons of other James Bond-like gadgets.

THE LOWDOWN: According to Millar, "Iron Man" may be a ways off, but that'll give the duo enough time to familiarize themselves with the character.

"We didn't know much about Tony Stark prior to hearing about him from [Marvel Studios President] Avi Arad," Gough said in published reports. "His passion for all of these characters is so infectious that when he talks about them, it's like he's talking about his own children."

DID YOU KNOW: "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" creator Joss Whedon was originally tapped to write and possibly direct "Iron Man," but according to the creator, things became too big and slow for him to handle.

KING CONAN: CROWN OF IRON

(Warner Brothers)

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director John Milius ("Conan the Barbarian"), Arnold Schwarzenegger (Conan)

RELEASE DATE: 2004

PREMISE: The brawny barbarian is back! The first Conan film since 1984's "Conan the Destroyer," "King" picks up the story of an older Conan who has become king and the battle he wages to win back his son.

THE LOWDOWN: The original "Conan the Barbarian" team of Milius and Schwarzenegger are together again—and this time, they've got the red-hot Wachowski Bros. as producers fighting by their side. Milius is currently scouting locations in Turkey and Rome for the film's massive battle sequences, which the Wachowskis hope will rival those of "Lord of the Rings."

DID YOU KNOW: At one point, scheduling conflicts actually forced Milius, Schwarzenegger and the Wachowskis to all drop out of the production. Conan Properties, Inc. wanted Warner Bros. to make the film immediately, but the Wachowski Bros. and Schwarzenegger were tied up with commitments until late 2003. So the project was pretty much dead—until a fan petition drew the principals back onboard.

MAN-THING

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Brett Leonard ("The Lawnmower Man")

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: Working on a serum that could tap all of the human body's potential, Dr. Ted Sallis injected himself with an untested "super soldier" formula. Fleeing into the swamps, the combination of mystical forces and his untested formula kept him alive as the misshapen monster, the Man-Thing.

THE LOWDOWN: Seeking out vengeance on the people who sabotaged his work and tried to murder him, Sallis finds in his new form, anyone who knows fear will burn at his touch. "We've got a script; we've got a director," says Marvel Studios head honcho Avi Arad. "We have some very exciting storyboards. Very creepy and fun to look at."

DID YOU KNOW: Reportedly, "Man-Thing" will veer away from modern comic book films and evolve into a horror film unlike anything fans have seen from Marvel Studios.

THE MATRIX: RELOADED

(Warner Bros.)

MAJOR PLAYERS: Directors/screenwriters The Wachowski Brothers, Keanu Reeves (Neo), Laurence Fishburne (Morpheus), Carrie-Anne Moss (Trinity), Hugo Weaving (Agent Smith), Matt McColm (Agent Thompson), Jada Pinkett Smith (Niobe), Monica Bellucci (Persephone)

RELEASE DATE: May 15, 2003

PREMISE: The first "Matrix" told the story of a hacker named Neo who learns that his reality is simply a computer simulation created by machines to enslave the human race. Once jolted from his lifelong slumber, Neo discovers that he's a messianic figure known as The One, and that it's his destiny to save the world.

THE LOWDOWN: Picking up directly after the events of "The Matrix," "Reloaded" finds the machines have made huge strides in wiping out humans. They've learned the location of Zion, the last human city, hidden near the planet's core. Their plan is to tunnel down to the city and use thousands of sentinels—the squid-like kamikazes from Part One—to obliterate it. Tracking down the Keymaker, a mysterious new character, is humanity's only hope. Fans will also learn that the Matrix is actually a megacity, more than 10 times the size of New York. The machine world isn't entirely evil, and there are powerful machines that have been surpassed by newer, more ruthless models—and they aren't happy about it.

DID YOU KNOW: Stay in your seats for the duration of the eight-minute credits that follow "Reloaded" for an exclusive trailer of November's "The Matrix: Revolutions"!

THE MATRIX: REVOLUTIONS

(Warner Bros.)

MAJOR PLAYERS: Same as "The Matrix: Reloaded"

RELEASE DATE: November 2003

PREMISE: Reeling from the events of "Reloaded," Neo and Co. continue their war against the machines that have enslaved humanity.

THE LOWDOWN: With "Revolutions" hitting theaters just six months after "Reloaded," everyone from the press-shy Wachowski Brothers to producer Joel Silver aren't talking. But it will reportedly be the film fans have waited for with an all-out war between humans and machines.

DID YOU KNOW: If you think "The Matrix" website was important to the first film, just wait for the sequels, according to Silver. "There are 1,100 'Matrix' fan sites," says Silver. "We have 50,000 hits a day, every day on our website. This is not promotional stuff. It's full of content, and we think that it's critical."

PUNISHER

MAJOR PLAYERS: Thomas Jane (Punisher), writer/director Jonathan Hensleigh ("Armageddon")

RELEASE DATE: 2004

PREMISE: As a result of his final field assignment, FBI undercover agent Frank Castle's family is murdered by the men he thought he'd put away. Castle becomes The Punisher, hunting down criminals and playing judge, jury and executioner to the guilty.

THE LOWDOWN: After reportedly flirting with Howie Long ("Firestorm") and Kurt Russel ("Dark Blue"), Artisan has made it official: actor Thomas Jane ("Deep Blue Sea," "61*") has been inked to play Marvel's most brutal vigilante. According to published

IRONVILLE The creators of "Smallville" are currently at work on an "Iron Man" screenplay.

THE LEAGUE TOONS UP

The Justice League, the most powerful heroes in the DC Universe, took over the airwaves two years ago with Cartoon Network's "Justice League"—and the Big Seven haven't looked back since.

Season 3 kicks off Saturday, July 5 at 8 p.m., with four classic episodes from "Superman: The Animated Series" that lead into the 10 p.m. launch of a two-part premiere called "Twilight," which finds Darkseid asking Superman and the Justice League for help in protecting Apokolips from a powerful enemy. Following that, the new season officially kicks off in October (date to be determined) and features tons of new guest stars, including Amazo, Despero, Dr. Destiny and Mr. Fate. There's also a Harley Quinn-Joker escapade in Las Vegas, another Aquaman appearance, the return of Vandal Savage and a special Christmas episode!

MARTIAN MANHUNTER

"We've got so many surprises," says "Justice League" writer/producer Bruce Timm. "In the second season, we've concentrated on making sure the show lives up to its full potential. [Last season,] we didn't give enough attention to Superman. Everybody complains that the 'Justice League' Superman is a super wimp. He's restored to his full grandeur in Season 2."

But before the new season gets underway, you'll wanna know what you've missed! Here's a rundown of all 26 episodes that have been produced so far.

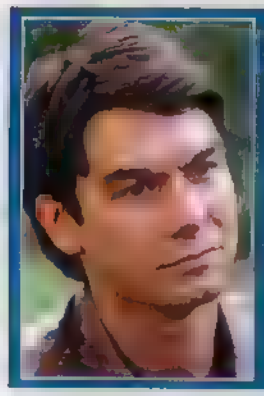
"SECRET ORIGINS" (Episodes 1-3) J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, arrives on Earth in wake of an impending alien invasion, sparking the formation of the Justice League, consisting of himself, Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern (John Stewart), Hawkgirl and The Flash.

"IN BLACKEST NIGHT" (Episodes 4-5) The intergalactic police force known as the Manhunters arrest Green Lantern for abuse of his power, but while he's on trial, the Justice League learns that the Manhunters have a hidden agenda: the complete and utter destruction of the Green Lantern Corps!

"THE ENEMY BELOW" (Episodes 6-7) Aquaman, a founder of the League in comics continuity, debuts for the first time on the cartoon. Superman must convince the Sea King to come to the surface world and sign a peace treaty, but that gives his evil brother Orin the chance to take over Atlantis. Aquaman then must team up with the League in order to stop the Atlantean forces from conquering the surface world.

"INJUSTICE FOR ALL" (Episodes 8-9) When Lex Luthor learns he's dying of

Continued on page 109



"I know for a fact that I look good in blue spandex. If it doesn't happen, Space Ghost is always an option."

[illegible] for the role of Superman

reports, Jane has already begun to bulk up for the role. "We are in pre-production and storyboarding," says Arad. "We're putting together an incredibly high-class version of the Punisher."

DID YOU KNOW: With superhero films currently the best bet in Hollywood, Artisan's reportedly looking to make one of the darkest superhero films to ever see the silver screen.

RISING STARS: BORN IN FIRE

MAJOR PLAYERS: J. Michael Straczynski (creator/screenwriter)

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: A brilliant and unexplained flash of light over the town of Pederson, Ill., in 1969 imbued 113 children with incredible powers. The story deals with how these "Specials" coped with life and death as superpowered beings in a world that has never known superheroes before.

THE LOWDOWN: The feature film based on the first eight-issue arc of Top Cow's *Rising Stars* was originally slated for a 2002 release, but a variety of delays have set the production back. As it stands now, the Russo Brothers (directors of 2002's "Welcome to Collinwood") have just recently submitted a rewrite of J. Michael Straczynski's screenplay, which will need to be approved before casting or a director search can begin.

DID YOU KNOW: The original plan was for "Rising Stars" to be produced as a film trilogy, with each movie covering eight issues of the eventual 24-issue run of the series. Rumor has it that the second and third films could be shot concurrently, á lá the "Matrix" sequels

SUPERMAN (Warner Bros.)

MAJOR PLAYERS: Screenwriter J.J. Abrams ("Alias")

RELEASE DATE: Summer 2004

PREMISE: The sole survivor of the doomed planet Krypton, young Kal-El was sent to Earth, crash-landing in Smallville, Kan. As Kal-El—or Clark Kent, as his adoptive parents named him—grew, he soon discovered he had powers and abilities that far exceed those of normal humans. Rather than exploit and abuse his power, Clark assumes the mantle of Superman, saving humanity's collective rear-end on more than one occasion.

THE LOWDOWN: Due to the ongoing search for an actor to play Superman and the departure of director Brett Ratner, production has been delayed yet again. However, "Superman" screenwriter J.J. Abrams (ABC's "Alias") hinted at what the story would entail. "It's sort of a slightly different telling of a familiar story," Abrams recently said in published reports. "It's very much an origin story, and there are some great surprises in it. But I think you will not have to have seen the previous films to invest in it."

DID YOU KNOW: Who's gonna play Superman? That's the burning question in Hollywood. While Josh Hartnett ("Pearl Harbor"), Brendan Fraser ("The Mummy") and Jerry O'Connell ("Kangaroo Jack") have screen-tested for the role, Hartnett was offered the role but declined to commit. Also, sources indicate that Rob Lowe ("The West Wing") may be a lock for the role of Lex Luthor, but Anthony Hopkins (who was to play Jor-El) will most likely bow out of the production due to Ratner's departure.

Justice League: © Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., O'Connell Everett Collection.

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

MAJOR PLAYERS: Steve Niles (screenwriter)

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: Steve Niles' breakthrough mini-series comes alive on the big screen, courtesy of producer Sam Raimi. "30 Days of Night" follows the fate of the inhabitants of a small Alaskan town where once a year the sun sets for a full month, leaving the town in 30 days of perpetual night. The darkness opens the door for a horde of vampires to descend upon the townsfolk, and the only thing that stands between the vampires and the utter massacre of the residents are the town's sheriff and his deputy wife.

THE LOWDOWN: Columbia Pictures has signed on as a partner in the production of "30 Days of Night," (along with Sam Raimi's Senator International, which won a fierce bidding war for the rights last year). A first draft has been submitted for approval, with the director search and casting still to come. "So far so good!" reported Niles. "Everybody's happy with what's being written. It's a very straightforward scary movie, and so far we're not having any disagreements."

DID YOU KNOW: Due to his commitment to "Spider-Man 2," Raimi will not claim the director's chair—but word is that plenty of A-list directors have been calling to ask about the gig.

TOMB RAIDER II: LARA CROFT AND THE CRADLE OF LIFE

MAJOR PLAYERS: Director Jan de Bont ("Speed"), Angelina Jolie (Lara Croft), Gerard Butler (Terry Sheridan)

RELEASE DATE: July 25, 2003

PREMISE: The sequel follows Lara's battle against Chen Lo and his nefarious Chinese crime syndicate. With the help of fellow tomb raider—and former flame—Terry Sheridan, Lara embarks on a globe-spanning adventure in search of the mythical Pandora's Box, a powerful artifact that Chen Lo and new villain Reiss plan on using to unleash a destructive force on the world.

THE LOWDOWN: The most recognizable female character in video game history made a huge splash with her movie debut, which remains the highest box-office draw for an action film starring a female character—ever. With the sultry Jolie reprising her role, the stage is set for even more heart-stopping, adrenaline-pumping action. In fact, rumor has it that the movie starts off with an incredible action sequence that takes place almost entirely underwater!

DID YOU KNOW: Jolie is rumored to be performing the raciest stunt of all—baring it all in front of the camera! Word has it that Jolie approved a nude scene in the sequel's screenplay after refusing to appear naked in the original. But Paramount has the final decision on this revealing topic, and it remains to be seen whether the studio will take the plunge.

WAY OF THE RAT

MAJOR PLAYERS:

Director/ screenwriter Chuck Russell ("The Mask")

RELEASE DATE: TBD

PREMISE: A mystical martial arts romp filled with fistfights, demons, dragons and enchanted monkeys, "WotR" features Boon Sai Hong, a common thief who finds himself in possession of ancient and powerful artifacts—the Ring of Staffs and the Book of the Hell of the Hungry Dragons. With the enchanted drunken monkey Po Po as his companion (no, really!), Boon becomes an unwitting hero to the beleaguered people of Zhumar.

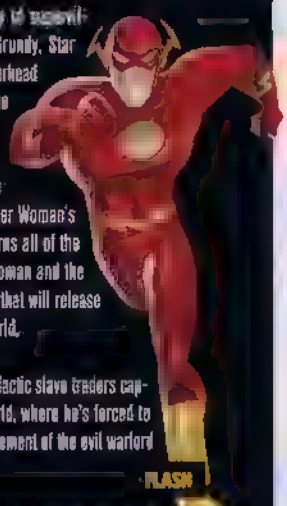
THE LOWDOWN: Russell has already submitted a screenplay for studio approval, and once that's locked up, the filmmakers will be cleared to move ahead with casting.

DID YOU KNOW: How will Po Po, the alcoholic simian and unofficial mascot of CrossGen, translate to the big screen? It's still too early to tell, but we're thinking CGI-animation á lá Gollum in "The Two Towers."

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES on "Wonder Woman" "Namor," "The Crow 4" and more comic movies, visit www.wizarduniverse.com

THE LEAGUE TOONS UP (cont.)

Kryptonite poisoning, he hires an army of supervillains—including the Shade, Solomon Grundy, Star Sapphire, Cheetah, Ultra-Humanite, Copperhead and the Joker—to help him destroy the Justice League before he expires.



"PARADISE LOST" (Episodes 10-11) The evil wizard Felix Faust takes over Wonder Woman's home, the island of Themyscira, and turns all of the Amazons into stone, forcing Wonder Woman and the League to help him find an ancient relic that will release the god of war Ares from the underworld.

"WAR WORLD" (Episodes 12-13) Intergalactic slave traders capture Superman and take him to War World, where he's forced to fight in gladiatorial combat for the amusement of the evil warlord Mongul, the planet's conqueror.

FLASH

"THE FLASH & THE GUILD" (Episodes 14-15) In a nod to the classic Silver Age team-ups, Flash and Green Lantern combine forces to stop Gorilla Grodd from using his mind-control powers to take over Central City and leading a bloody revolution in the ultra-secretive Gorilla City.

"FURY" (Episodes 16-17) A renegade Amazon named Artemis takes over Lex Luthor's gang, forcing Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl to stop the marauders from taking over Man's World—a.k.a. the rest of the planet!

"LEGENDS" (Episodes 18-19) The Justice League gets blasted into an alternate reality where they meet the Justice Guild of America (a remix version of the JSA), whose adventures Green Lantern remembers reading as a young boy. And what's the hidden connection between that fact and the Guild's teenaged sidekick?

"A KNIGHT OF SHADOWS" (Episodes 20-21) The League joins forces with The Demon, Etrigan, to stop the ancient sorceress Morgan Le Fey from finding the ancient Sorceror's Stone, a relic of great power she could use to take over the world.

"METAMORPHOSIS" (Episodes 22-23) Green Lantern reunites with an old Marine buddy, Rex Mason, now a successful chemical company executive. But when Mason's exposed to a powerful mutagen that turns him into the element man called Metamorpho, he goes berserk and takes his rage out on GL and the League.

BATMAN

"THE SAVAGE TIME" (Episodes 24-26) Returning to Earth from a space mission, the League discovers that the world has radically changed and is ruled by the immortal villain called Vandal Savage. To save the present, the League travels back in time to re-fight World War II alongside Sgt. Rock and the Blackhawks! ■ ANDY SERWIN

STUFF

COMIC BOOK MERCHANDISE YOU CAN BUY...

By Joshua Elder

AVAILABLE AT YOUR LOCAL COMICS RETAILER

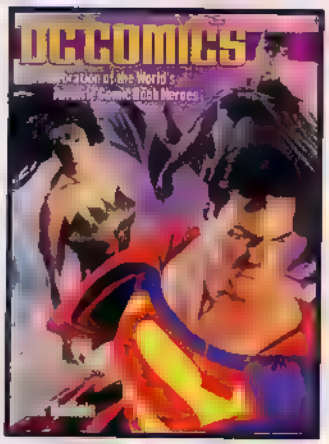
Are you a company who sells stuff cool enough to make the grade here? Let us be the judges of that. Send any info/samples to: Stuff for "Stuff," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920-2064. And check your local stores for availability of all these products, or ask you retailer to order 'em for you!

PREPARE TO MEET YOUR DOOM!

Sculptor Rudy Garcia has captured Dr. Doom in his most natural state: triumphant. This 6-inch-tall bust by Diamond Select, due in stores by July, is limited to 5,000 pieces and has a retail price of $45. Doom strongly "suggests" that you buy it, and as the Fantastic Four can tell attest, Doom's suggestions are not to be taken lightly.

MASTER OF PUPPETS

The first in a new line of high-end collectibles from the DC Direct Gallery, the Joker Marionette will at last give fans the power to control the actions of Batman's deadliest foe. Due in stores Sept. 24, this clownishly criminal puppet is part of a limited and numbered set of only 777 pieces! At $250 apiece, the Joker Marionette is going to be a must-have for any serious Batman collector.



THE 411 ON DC

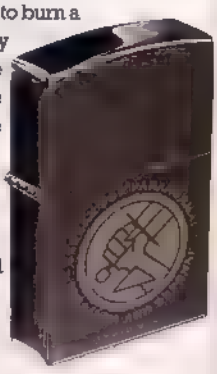
Offered for the first time in softcover, Les Daniels' definitive examination of the history of DC Comics and its characters arrives in stores this May with a $29.95 price tag. Updated with 16 additional pages and packed with 650 illustrations by the greatest artists in DC's long history, this is an invaluable resource for DC fans everywhere and a wonderful addition to any comic library.

ALL JACKED UP

The latest Transformers bust from Hard Hero (**www.hardhero.com**), Wheeljack is the Autobot's resident scientist and engineer—and he's pretty handy with an energy rifle, too. He measures approximately 6 inches tall and has a limited release of 2,500 pieces. You can find the brainy Transformer on shelves this June going for $49.99.

DEVILISHLY GOOD MERCHANDISE

Layered with a dark chrome finish that has the B.P.R.D. logo laser-etched directly into the surface, this genuine Zippo™ lighter from Dark Horse comics (**www.darkhorsecomics.com**) is going to burn a hole in every Hellboy fan's wallet. Dark Horse is also offering a coffee mug featuring Mike Mignola's demonic adventurer. Both items are scheduled to go on sale on June 25 and retail for $29.99 and $9.99 respectively.



HOTSTUFF!!!

PRODUCT OF...THE MONTH

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

The second wave of "Justice League" figures by Mattel, based on the Cartoon Network animated series, hits the shelves in June. This series includes not only new versions of Batman and Superman, but also the remaining three members of the League not represented in wave one (Hawkgirl, Martian Manhunter and Wonder Woman). Each figure stands 4 3/4" tall and retails for $9.99 apiece.

SPIDEY GETS ARTSY

It's villains, villains and more villains in this exclusive, fully painted Dynamic Forces (**www.dynamicforces.com**) lithograph by artist John Estes. His gorgeous rendering of Spidey's most dastardly foes is presented in the large format is deserves, measuring 18" by 24". Take home the two different editions—a regular version for $19.99 and one signed by the artist for $49.99—this May.

SEND IN THE CLONES

They may be clones, but that doesn't mean they can't be individuals. This July, Dark Horse teams up with Gentle Giant Studios to produce the world's first-ever modular mini-bust. The 5 1/2" tall Clone Trooper ($50) from "Star Wars: Episode II" comes with a variety of accessories and arm configurations so that no two busts are exactly the same.

THE TANGLED WEB OF ROMANCE

The two great loves of Peter Parker's life, Gwen Stacy and Mary Jane Watson, get the statue treatment thanks to Diamond Select and sculptor Mike Cuzanelli of Art Asylum. Shipping in July, both MJ and Gwen stand 10 3/4" tall and are limited to 2,500 pieces each. Based on the work of legendary Spider-Man artist John Romita Sr., these lovely ladies are worth every penny of their $150 price tag.

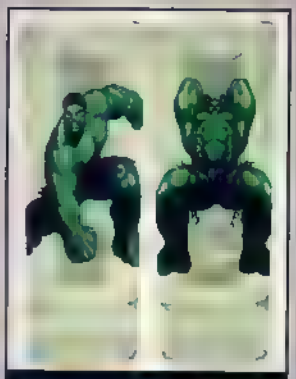
GREEN AROUND THE GILLS

MOVIE TIE-INS

HULK SMASH PUNY MERCHANDISE!

The big merchandising push for the "Hulk" movie is underway and that means lots and lots of kitschy but irresistible licensed stuff from the good folks at NECA. All items ship in May, while Universal and Marvel Studios' "Hulk" movie hits theaters on June 20.

HULK STEIN ($12.99) Few people know this, but the Hulk prefers Bud Light because it's less filling.



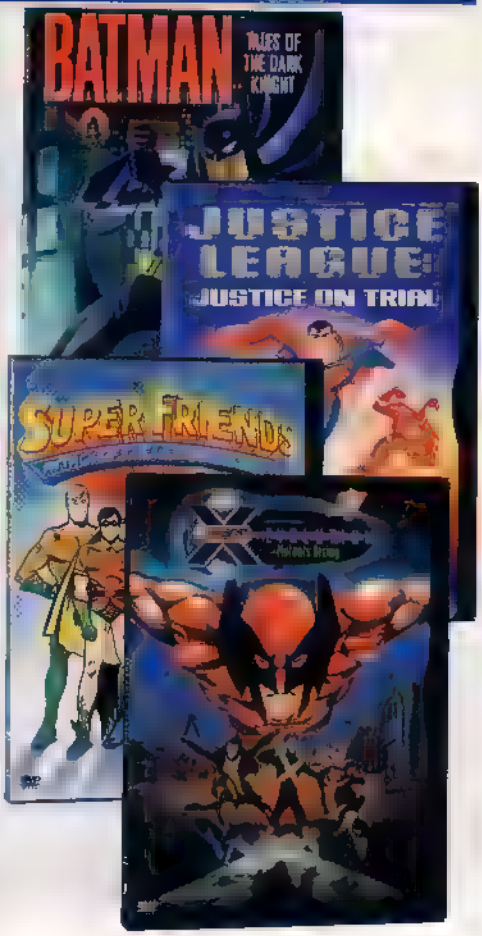
HULK SHOOTER SET ($9.99) Now really, is there anything better than drinking tequila out of a Hulk shot glass? No, we didn't think so either.

HULK BOBBLE HEAD ($11.99) Sure, his head may be a little too large for his body but do you want to be the one to tell him that?

HULK MOTION LAMP ($44.99) The first lava lamp to be powered entirely by gamma radiation, expect this to light up the sales charts.

ULTIMATELY PISSED OFF

The monster that destroyed midtown Manhattan in the pages of *Ultimates* finally gets his own figure courtesy of Toy Biz and Diamond Select. Expertly sculpted by Sam Greenwell, the grey goliath stands a massive 8 inches tall (hunched over, no less) and features a whopping 16 points of articulation. And like the rest of the Marvel Select line, Ultimate Hulk will be available only in comic stores. The $18.99 figure smashes its way onto the shelves this July.



CELLULOID SUPERHEROES

Batman, the Justice League, the Super Friends and the X-Men are teaming up to conquer the home video market! In stores now, these DVDs collect episodes of the fan-favorite cartoon series. And in the case of "Super Friends" and "X-Men: Evolution," this is the first time that either show has ever been released on DVD. All DVDs retail for $19.98 each.

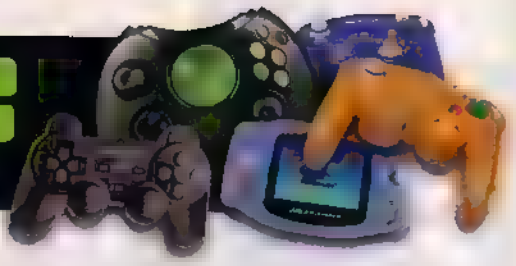
YOU'RE ONE UGLY...

The galaxy's most fearsome big-game hunter is ready to stalk the aisles of comic stores everywhere. This huge (if it were standing it would be over 14 inches tall) resin statue from Palisades Toys (**www.palisades toys.com**) is based on a scene from the hit film "Predator 2." Each $120 statue comes individually numbered and ready to take a few trophies.

GRENDEL GETS BUSTED

Master sculptor Randy Bowen (**www.bowendesigns.com**) brings the first three incarnations of Matt Wagner's Grendel—Hunter Rose (6 1/2") Christine Sparr (8") and Brian Li Sung (6")—into the third dimension. The Grendel Cycle spans hundreds of years and the Grendel name has been alternately worshipped and reviled, but these are the three that started it all. Hitting the shelves in June, the three-piece set sells for $60.

video game
STUFF



BANNER GAME

'Hulk' game smashes into stores before the movie hits theaters

He's mean. He's green. And he's taking over your TV screen.

Ang Lee's film version of the Green Goliath doesn't premiere until June, but gaming addicts can get their fix of gamma-irradiated destruction in May, when Universal Interactive unleashes the *Hulk* video game for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube. Based on movie continuity and set roughly a year after the events of the film, *Hulk* follows the continuing adventures of Bruce Banner as he struggles to control the raging monster within.

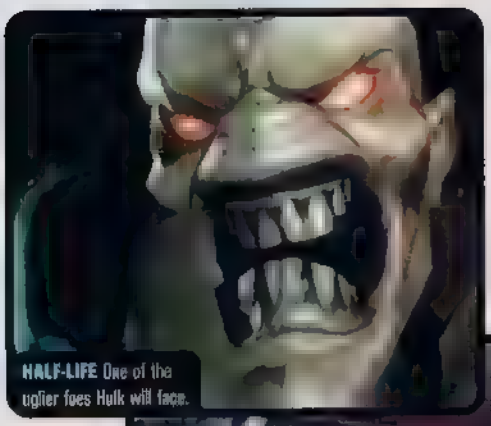
BLACK HAWK DOWN Ol' Green genes takes on the Army.

Developed by Radical Entertainment, the game sticks to one simple yet powerful formula: Hulk smash! Virtually every object players encounter throughout the game can be destroyed, and random mayhem and devastation aren't just allowed—they're encouraged. Fittingly, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to master the Hulk's arsenal of attacks. Punch, slap, head-butt, shoulder ram—even grab and toss anything from machinery to hapless soldiers! Throw in killer combos and a selection of special moves that includes a sonic clap and an earth-shaking ground punch, and you've got all the ingredients for a full-blown smashfest. There's even a special Rage Meter that tracks the Hulk's anger level. When full, our rampaging hero glows green and launches into a savage berserker rage rivaling that of a certain Canuck. And if that's not enough to get your gamma-irradiated blood pumping, check out the special cheat features, which include an invincibility code and the option to play as the ultra-cool gray Hulk!

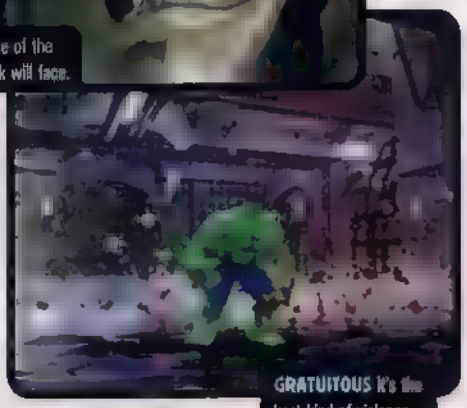
Of course it's not *all* just mindless destruction. Players can hone their skills in the Challenge Mode, which features options like Endurance Mode, Time Attack and Hulk Smash. Then, when they're good and ready, they can embark on the Story Mode, which takes them through five chapters (23 levels in all) of intense, movie-inspired action.

This time out, the movie Hulk tests his might against a bonafide supervillain that comic fans are sure to recognize: the Leader. The diabolical, gamma-powered genius is intent on stealing the Hulk's gamma energy to create an army of superpowered drones. With the help of Professor Crawford—former friend and mentor to Bruce Banner who becomes the gamma-mutated monster Ravage—the Leader succeeds, trapping the Hulk's essence in the mysterious Orb. Your mission? Chase the Leader's minions across a variety of different terrains and reclaim your stolen Hulk mojo. The quest takes you from gas stations and top-secret government labs (locations taken straight from the movie!) to Alcatraz and the Leader's secret headquarters. Along the

HULK SMASH!



HALF-LIFE One of the uglier foes Hulk will face.



GRATUITOUS It's the best kind of violence.

with puny humans, armored tanks and ugly, gamma-powered bosses like Half-Life, Flux and Madman. And just to make things a little more interesting for ol' Green Genes, the evil General Ryker and the bewitching Betty Ross show up to round out the supporting cast.

And when you get tired of wrecking stuff, there are even a few levels where you can play as plain ol' Bruce Banner! As the less-than-powerful scientist, players can move objects around and even fight if push-comes-to-shove—but of course, Banner's arsenal of fighting skills pales in comparison to his emerald alter-ego's. Instead, players are required to use stealth and Banner's sizable brain power to solve puzzles and overcome obstacles.

Visually, the game employs a unique combination of cel-shading and realistic rendering, resulting in a stylized look that fits both the movie and the comic book version of our rampaging hero. And with widescreen cinematic cut scenes and a special features menu filled with tons of behind-the-scenes movie info, players will get the distinct impression that they're actually *playing* a Hulk movie. All of which makes for a smashing good time. ■ RICHARD HO

videorumblings

BITS AND BYTES!

SPLINTER CELL-OUT? Sam Fisher, star of *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, sneaks onto the PS2, GameCube, and Game Boy Advance to assassinate all our free time this spring. Be prepared for new missions, new weapons and even a way to bring Fisher's special brand of special ops action to your cell phone!

THE WORST NEWS IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND! Well, it may not be as bad as waiting eight frickin' years for a new *Metroid* game, but it's damn close. Bungie recently announced that *HALO 2* for the Xbox has been delayed until early 2004!

BOARDLESS NO MORE! *Phantasy Star Online* for Nintendo's GameCube has never been able to live up to it's full multiplayer potential because there's never been a keyboard available for sale in North America—until now! UK peripheral manufacturer Datel has announced plans to release a keyboard for the GameCube called the Powerboard! Check http://www.codejunkies.com/ for more details and thank us later!

SAM FISHER

SOLID CUBE The usually tight-lipped Nintendo creator Shigeru Miyamoto has dropped hints during a recent European Press Tours concerning an exclusive new *Metal Gear* game for the GameCube. Konami has confirmed it's in the works but has yet to release a shipping date. Could this be the long-rumored re-make of the NES classic of the same name? Hopefully we'll find out at this year's E3 game expo.

MORE E3 RUMORS

–Nintendo may use the LAN capabilities in its upcoming GameCube *Mario Kart* title to all allow gamers to hook up multiple TV's and 'Cubes for huge multiplayer races.

–It appears that SONY will be entering the portable gaming market, though it's unclear whether the system will use disks or cartridges. And Microsoft may be thinking the same thing.

–Could *Kingdom Hearts* be the new *Final Fantasy*? *Hearts* sold huge internationally, and may continue with the same main characters, but crossing over into new universes–possibly outside of Disney! It's also rumored that Disney is planning a movie/TV series based on the game.

MINNIE AND DAISY

–EA has a great turn-around rate! Not only yearly updates of our favorite sports titles, but new *007*, *Medal of Honor*, *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* games will be under our Christmas tree's this year! ■ MIKEY BENOX

games we wanna see

CROSSGEN UNIVERSE

THE BOOKS CrossGen supplies a much-needed commodity to the comics industry: diversity. From epic fantasy to detective fiction, the CrossGen universe provides a little something for everyone. And having a talent roster that boasts heavyweights like George Perez, Greg Land and Chuck Dixon doesn't hurt, either.

THE GAME Andra Radiant, star of *Solus* by writer Barbara Kesel and artist George Perez, journeys to the myriad worlds of the CrossGen universe in her quest to unlock the secrets of her past. Cast from the same mold as Squaresoft's *Kingdom Hearts* , the CrossGen game would be primarily a first-person action RPG with a variety of mini-games appropriate to each world (i.e. a starfighter sim for *Sigil* or a real-time strategy game for *Scion*) woven into the story.

JUST IMAGINE Teaming up with *Sojourn*'s bow-wielding warrior Arwen in an epic final battle with the insanely powerful Mordath for the fate of an entire world. And that's just the first level...

REALITY BYTE Video game developers are actively courting CrossGen in the hopes of adapting its properties, so expect to see this game (or something like it) sooner rather than later.

■ JOSHUA ELDER

TO ME, MY X-MEN

With the X-Men RPG you control the team!

Since first lutting the video game scene with their abysmal self-titled NES game in 1988, the X-Men have appeared in everything from side-scrolling adventure games to first person shooters. When we heard about Raven Software's new *X-Men Legends* RPG (winter release), we cornered Pat Lipo, the game's creator, to see if it would live up to hardcore X-Men fanboy expectations.

WIZARD: What characters can we expect to see in the game?
LIPO: We start with the classic five: Cyclops, Marvel Girl, Beast, Iceman and Angel. Beyond that, we have favorites like Wolverine, Nightcrawler and Gambit

Is this an action game or more of a turn-based RPG?
The best way to classify *X-Men Legends* is as an Action RPG. The gameplay is very hands-on, with a great deal of fighting and direct use of various characters' powers. You must choose which characters to bring on a mission and decide whose powers to use to overcome various enemies and obstacles.

Did you draw from past X-Men comic stories?
Uncanny X-Men has been the basis for much of our work. However, you will find that a lot of the bold, streamlined visual and story elements of *Ultimate X-Men* have also had a serious influence on the game as well.

How were the characters' mutant powers worked into the gameplay?
Each team member has a number of traits that can be advanced, as well as skills that can be trained in the Danger Room. You can choose what abilities to concentrate on for each character, for example whether to focus on developing Wolverine's strength or his speed. Also, the aspects of each character's powers can be trained as the player wishes. You can choose to build up Storm's lighting or focus more on her wind power.

Will we get to see classic throwdowns like Wolverine vs. Sabretooth?
Of course! How can we resist pitting Wolvie against Sabretooth at least once? There will be some classic matchups, but better yet, if you want to stage your own, you can do so in the Danger Room.

If this hasn't gotten you wiping drool off your chin yet, former X-scribes Joe Casey, Joe Kelly and Steve T. Seagle helped write the story—need we say more? ■ TODD CASEY

manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

THE *OTHER* MATRIX SEQUEL

'The Animatrix' takes sci-fi addicts further down the rabbit hole

"The Matrix" was unlike anything American audiences had ever seen—unless they were fans of Japanese anime, that is. It's no secret that "Matrix" writers/directors the Wachowski Brothers drew inspiration for their gravity-defying fight sequences and dizzying camerawork from the Land of the Rising Sun. So as both a tribute to the anime visionaries who inspired the blockbuster trilogy and as a companion to the next two big-screen flicks, Warner Bros. is unleashing "The Animatrix."

Comprised of nine short films directed by seven of the most high-profile creators in the anime community, the "Animatrix" DVD (which hits shelves June 3) takes fans on an impressive trip of kinetic style and thought-provoking substance.

"A lot of [the episodes] overlap either events in the first movie or, in some ways, the episodes overlap each other," explained Peter Chung, creator of MTV's "Aeon Flux" and writer/director of the longest episode in the anthology, "Matriculated."

Fueled by an American budget—rather than the typically low resources of overseas productions—the "Animatrix" is unlike anything the medium has offered up before. As Mahiro Maeda ("Blue Submarine #6"), director of two shorts, "The Second Renaissance: Part 1" and "Part 2," says, "There have always been restrictions of the number of hours we spent on productions because of the amount of money that you have to pay people. But now, for the first time, we didn't have as many restrictions, so we were able to work a little more freely."

And Maeda certainly makes excellent use of that freedom. "Second Renaissance" (both parts are available for download at www.whatisthematrix.com, along with two other shorts) sifts through the historical archives of Zion, the last human city. A deft combination of Maeda's designs and direction, computer-generated and hand-drawn animation from Studio4°C in Tokyo and a script by Larry and Andy Wachowski, "Second Renaissance" gives fans the lowdown on how the machines came to power and began harvesting human beings for use as organic batteries.

The other important addition to Matrix canon comes in

RISING SUN A digital samurai from "Program"; a sexually-charged sword fight (top) from "Final Flight of the Osiris."

ANIME BUZZBOX

JAPANESE RUMOR MILL

GOING BERSERK Dark Horse Comics, with a little help from Digital Manga, has acquired the publishing rights to Kentaro Miura's medieval fantasy epic *Berserk*. The company plans to release the outrageously violent three-volume series in a non-westernized format where the text reads right to left and the original Japanese sound effects remain intact. Look for it this fall.

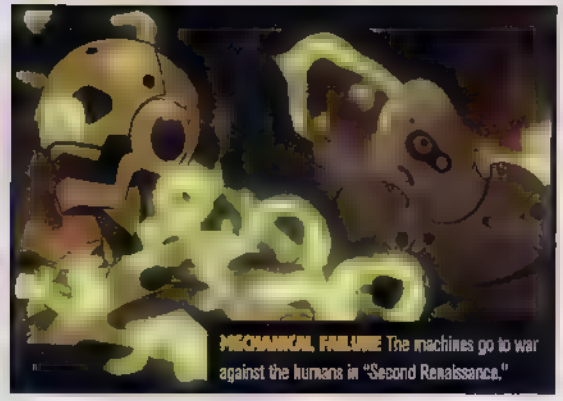
"A" IS FOR ANIME The good folks at Merriam-Webster have finally caught up with the times and added anime to their dictionary. According to its entry, anime is "a style of animation originating in Japan that is characterized by stark, colorful graphics depicting vibrant characters in action-filled plots, often with fantastic or futuristic themes." First the dictionary–then the world!

FLEXING THEIR 'ULTIMATE MUSCLE' Cartoon fans across America cry out as if with one voice: "We want more 'Ultimate Muscle'!" Toei Animation, the Japanese animation studio that produces the show, has heard them and is crafting a 26-episode sequel to the popular Fox Network program for exclusive release in the U.S. This marks the first time that Toei has ever produced an animated series solely for an overseas market rather than selling a domestic hit abroad.

MONTHLY NO MORE In a move that could be a harbinger of things to come, Viz has cancelled the monthly *Dragonball* comic series, opting to publish it solely in trade paperback form. TOKYOPOP has already eliminated its monthly comic line, so does this mean monthly manga may soon go the way of the dodo? Only time–and sales numbers–will tell.

LUPIN III GOES HOLLYWOOD Gerald R. Molen, producer of such films as "Schindler's List" and "Jurassic Park," has acquired the live-action movie rights to Pioneer's charismatic rogue, Lupin III. "I'm so thrilled I could fly," series creator Kazuhiko Kato said in published reports. "I want the film to continue as long as the 007 series." No stars have been lined up as of yet, but we think Jim Carrey would be perfect as the comedic master thief.

GET STONED The Jagun Fighters from Bandai are coming to America this July, and they promise to forever change the way we look at action figures. The new toyline combines collectible action figures with strategic gameplay (á lá games like HeroClix or Mage Knight) to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The stone fighters (50 in all) come with exclusive trading cards containing character info while some also ship with the mysterious "Eye," a powerful gameplay accessory.



MECHANICAL FAILURE The machines go to war against the humans in "Second Renaissance."

"The Final Flight of the Osiris" (which premiered theatrically before "Dreamcatcher" in March). Directed by Andy Jones, who also led the animation team on "Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within," the nine-minute short stands head-and-shoulders above the other "Animatrix" offerings in terms of photo-realistic eye-candy. Beginning in a Matrix simulator—chock full of clanging swords and wild wall-jumping inside the confines of a simulated ancient Japanese dojo—"Final Flight" quickly cuts to the crew of the hovercraft *Osiris* as they discover thousands of Sentinels burrowing into Zion. Learning this bit of information costs them their lives, but not before they broadcast a warning to the remaining human rebels—a warning that plays an integral role in the events of "Matrix: Reloaded." "[The Wachowskis] saw our style and they thought it was a perfect medium to do the last piece in—the one piece that bridges the 2D animated pieces with the live-action movies—just because our animation was very realistic," Jones revealed.

Given the truly outstanding array of talent featured on the "Animatrix" anthology (including Koji Morimoto, animation supervisor for "Akira" and Shinichiro Watanabe of "Cowboy Bebop" fame) it will no doubt be a treat for fans of "The Matrix" and anime aficionados alike. It's also a bit of an oddity, in that American money was pumped into creating anime from scratch.

Though it may not be a rare occurrence much longer. For Warner Bros., the "Animatrix" is a multi-million dollar experiment that extends much farther than the rabbit hole. If DVD sales skyrocket, more collaborations using Japanese talent and U.S. bankrolls will be greenlit—though they won't necessarily be related to universe of "The Matrix."

But that's all in the future. For right now, just press "play" and get ready to take the red pill all over again. ■ **JON M. GIBSON**

BETTE NOIR Trinity goes all Philip Marlowe in "Detective Story."

HOT IMPORTS

MANGA

ALIEN NINE: BOOK 1 GN (Central Park Media) In typical (for manga, anyway) fashion, aliens are invading and the only one who can stop them is Yuri, a 6th grader with a symbiotic alien helmet. Let the hijinks ensue. **$15.95**

G-GUNDAM VOL. 1 GN (TOKYOPOP) The hit Cartoon Network anime series makes its manga debut here in the states! In the far future, conflicts between nations are settled in a tournament called Gundam Fight where each side pits giant mechanical warriors against the other. **$9.99**

IRON WOK JAN! VOL. 1 GN (ComicsOne) Sparks fly as arrogant young master chef Jan enters a culinary competition opposite the lovely and talented Kiriko. It's "Iron Chef"–once the cameras stop rolling. **$9.95**

YU-GI-OH! VOL. 1: THE MILLENNIUM PUZZLE (Viz) Shonen Jump's MVS (Most Valuable Series) gets a graphic novel of its very own this month. Join tenth-grade loner Yugi as he plays a game for the highest stakes imaginable: life and death! **$7.95**

ANIME

BLUE SUBMARINE 6 (Bandai) The oceans have risen and most of the earth's surface lies buried beneath the waves. Now an aggressive race of sea-dwellers have declared war on mankind and our only hope lies with the crew of the experimental vessel Blue Submarine 6. **DVD–$34.98**

MASTER KEATON VOL. 1: EXCAVATION (Pioneer) From the people who brought you "Trigun" and "Princess Mononoke" comes the story of globetrotting archeologist/adventurer Taichi Keaton. Contains the first five episodes of the popular series. **DVD–$29.98**

NINJA SCROLL 10TH ANNIVERSARY (Manga Entertainment) The anime that set the gold standard for over-the-top animated violence returns in this special anniversary edition. **DVD–$29.95**

NOIR VOL. 3 (ADV) Two deadly assassins must work together in order to uncover the secrets of their hidden pasts in this stylish thriller **DVD–$29.98**

SPIRITED AWAY (Buena Vista) Winner of the 2002 Academy Award for Best Animated Picture, this Hayao Miyazaki masterpiece has finally arrived on home video. **DVD–$29.99 VHS–$19.99**

STUFF

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION RESIN STATUES (Kaiyodo) Sculpted by Masaichiro Usui, these 12" resin renderings of Asuka and Rei–the two loveliest ladies to ever pilot an Eva–are too hot to handle but too cool to resist. **$170**

TRIGUN: KURONEKO BOBBLE HEAD (Great Eastern) Awwww...ain't potential roadkill cute? The unofficial "Trigun" mascot has never looked more adorable than while staring at a speeding 18-wheeler **$12.99**

COMMENTS? QUESTIONS? STORY IDEAS? DROP US A LINE AT
MANGAMANIA@WIZARDUNIVERSE.COM

SHUICHI VS. JUSTIN

Justin from Showtime's oh-so-masculine show "Queer as Folk" and Shuichi from the TOKYOPOP series Gravitation (release date of June 10) have a lot in common apart from their "alternative lifestyles." How do they measure up where it counts?

■ **TRISHA L. SEBASTIAN**

Shuichi
Longs for arrogant novelist Yuki

Justin
Longs for sexy ad executive Brian

EDGE:

Shuichi
Nicknamed "Shu-Chan." Translation: "lil' Shu" (wonder how he got that...)

Justin
Nicknamed, for obvious reasons, "Sunshine" and "Wonder Boy"

EDGE:

Shuichi
Wants to be a rock star with his band Bad Luck

Justin
Wants to be a comic book artist

EDGE:

Shuichi
Spends nights alone perfecting his music

Justin
Spends nights dancing in clubs to bad techno music

EDGE:

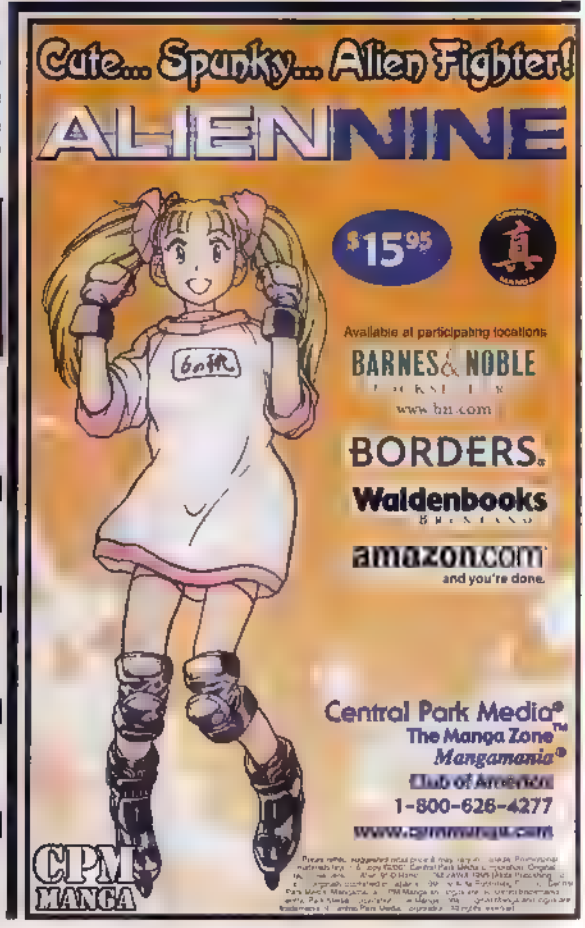
Shuichi
Wears clingy shirts, tight pants and plenty of leather

Justin
Wears preppie, J. Crew khakis and plenty of sweaters

EDGE:

Bottom Line:
Shuishi takes it. Rock stars rule—gay or straight. Not that there's anything wrong with that...

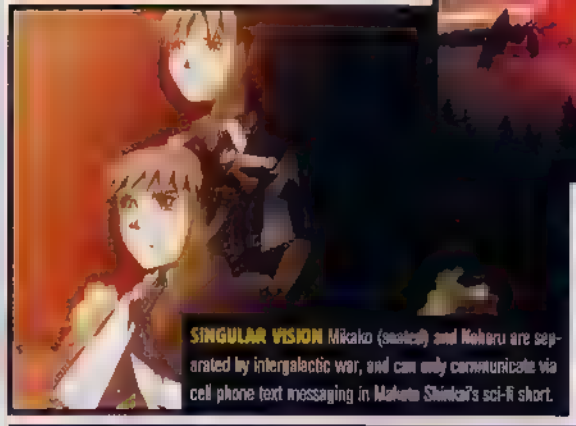
Justin photo courtesy of Everett Collection



FLYIN' SOLO

ADV unveils a one-man animated extravaganza

Makoto Shinkai has proven that one person can do it all. On June 10, ADV Films will release "Voices of a Distant Star," the Japanese animated short film that netted Shinkai the prestigious "Most Valuable Newcomer" award at the 2002 Tokyo International Anime Fair. Amazingly, the young animator created the film *all by himself*, with nothing more than a Macintosh G4/400 computer and a few several professional level design and animation programs! Using these tools, Shinkai mixed beautifully rendered CG animation with traditional cel animation to create the film's distinctive look.



SINGULAR VISION Mikako (seated) and Noboru are separated by intergalactic war, and can only communicate via cell phone text messaging in Makoto Shinkai's sci-fi short.

Written, directed and animated by Shinkai (only the music composition and voice acting were handled by others), the 30-minute film made its North American debut in a special screening at the San Diego Comic-Con International in August 2002, courtesy of ADV Films.

The sci-fi love story follows the trials and tribulations of a young pilot named Mikako who leaves behind Noboru, the love of her life, to wage an interstellar war against mysterious alien invaders. The only way the two lovers can communicate across the depths of space? Cell-phone text messages. Just brings a tear to your eye, doesn't it?

Thanks to the laws of relativity, Mikako hardly ages over the course of her interstellar voyage—but back home, Noboru grows steadily older. Even if Mikako survives the war, can the true love between the (literally) star-crossed lovers survive the ultimate long-distance relationship? ■ RICHARD HO

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BOOK of the MONTH!

LADY DEATH

NO FOOLIN'—CROSSGEN HAS TRANSFORMED THIS BIG-BOOBED FANTASY GIRL INTO A KICK-ASS FANTASY HERO IN THE TRADITION OF 'LORD OF THE RINGS'

It took him nine years, but Lady Death creator Brian Pulido has finally gotten his most infamous character right.

The latest title from CrossGen's new Code 6 creator owned imprint, *Lady Death: A Medieval Tale* draws inspiration more from J.R.R. Tolkien than Hugh Hefner. Pulido—ably assisted by artist Ivan Reis (*Avengers*)—has steered the former Chaos! Comics "bad girl" in a radical new direction that jettisons the T&A and Heaven/Hell metaphysics of previous series in favor of high fantasy and historical fiction.

"No doubt [the bad girl image] was a barrier to readers," admits the writer. "But we really have addressed that issue. This is not a bad girl book. She's a woman who doesn't fit in with her time and the people around her. She's in constant conflict. But by the same token, she's not a victim—she's a warrior."

DEATH BECOMES HER The new Lady Death may be less revealing, but she can give Gandalf a run for his hat!

And like all warriors, Lady Death's a product of her times. It's the 13th century and humanity wages war with a magical, near-immortal race known as the Eldritch (think evil elves). Threatened by the encroachment of their lands, the Eldritch raze the small European village of Novgorod in issue #1 in order to teach the human vermin their proper place—beneath Eldritch boot heel. The Eldritch cut the humans down like grain, indiscriminately slaughtering women and children with monstrous glee. The humans fight back, but they're hopelessly outmatched—all except Teutonic Knight Wolfram Von Bach.

Slaying several of the pale-faced devils before his wounds overcome him, the valiant Von Bach collapses at the feet of an Eldritch aristocrat, certain of his imminent demise. But the aristocrat simply walks away, ignoring him. He's only a *human*, after all. Hardly worth the effort. That's a big mistake, as Von Bach will later resurface.

While his troops wage war, the Eldritch king Tvarus finds pleasure in the arms of a beautiful local peasant girl named Marion. Their forbidden liaison produces a daughter named Hope. Years later, driven by an insatiable desire to learn about her past, Hope and her mother return to Novgorod—only to be killed by a mob of vengeful villagers after Hope accidentally reveals her half-Eldritch nature. Death claims Hope, but not for long. Tvarus wields his magic to wrench her soul free of the afterlife and evolve her body into something more than human or Eldritch: Lady Death. Which, ironically enough, fulfills Pulido's original vision for the character.

"I have a method of creating that I call clustering," reveals the scribe. "I begin with a blank piece of paper and write down everything that comes into my head. 'Heaven and Hell' Lady Death was the one I went with originally, but when I checked back

WHAT AM I DOING HERE? I AM NO WARRIOR.
I WANT TO BE A MISSIONARY, NOT A MURDERER!
TING
CHILDHOOD LIES BEHIND YOU. HOPE. CONTINUE YOUR DRILLS

TRAINING DAY With a new series focusing on sorcery and swordplay, Lady D better get past this whole "pacifist" thing. Her name is Death, after all.

on my older notes, I had one [idea] that had her in this medieval milieu—coming from a race that was not unlike like [fantasy author Michael Moorcock's] Elric. I've gone back to that as a starting point."

From that humble beginning has blossomed a grand medieval saga driven by a single overriding theme: alienation. According to Pulido, the albino beauty's dual nature makes her an outcast from both human and Eldritch society.

"This is the origin of the character," notes the author. "She's finding her place in the world. By the end of those first six issues, you're going to see where she stands. The Eldritch don't accept her at all and neither does the Church."

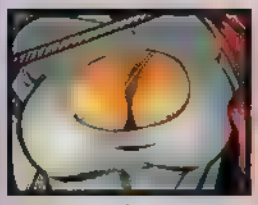
The first arc pits Lady Death (and newfound ally/mentor Wolfram Von Bach) against the Brothers of the Sword, a corrupt order of knights serving an avaricious archbishop who wants to burn Lady Death at the stake. The second arc (beginning with issue #7 in August) takes her to the Eldritch homeland of Arcadiana—now ruled by her bloodthirsty Uncle Throm after a coup deposed her father. After that, Lady Death's journeys will carry her to all ends of the earth as she searches for acceptance.

One of the rare series that truly deserves an "epic-in-the-making" banner, *Lady Death: AMT* re-establishes a former one-joke comic babe as the center of a powerful, character-driven story with battle sequences that would make even Peter Jackson's head spin! ■ **JOSHUA ELDER**

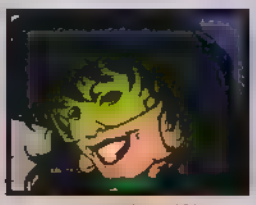
rackandroll

JUST A BUNCH OF BOOBS

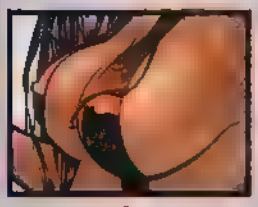
While Lady Death set the bar for buxom babes in comics, she could be saying ta-ta to her seniority. Match up the following chest shots with their respective owners to see how the competition stacks up! ■ **JOHN B. LACEY**



A.



1. PHANTOM LADY

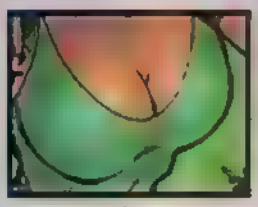


B.

2. BLACK CAT

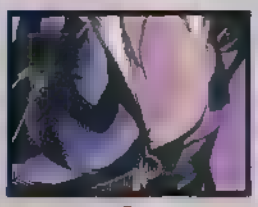
C

3. LARA CROFT

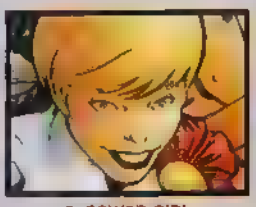


D.

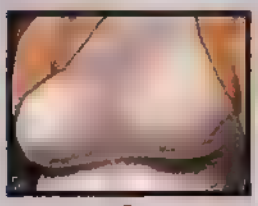
4. DAWN



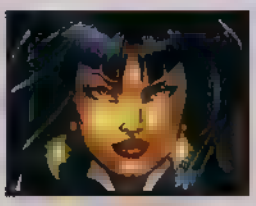
E.



5. POWER GIRL



F.



6. VAMPIRELLA

Answer key: A: 5, B: 6, C: 1, D: 3, E: 2, F: 4

picks

spotlighton...

JSA: ALL-STARS (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL When a host of amazing creators team up to do a mega-project like this, you can't help but stand up and take notice! Regular *JSA* co-writers Geoff Johns and David Goyer provide the main story in each of these eight issues, but a superstar lineup of creators chip in with back-up tales in issues #2-#7, including Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale (Hawkman), Darwyn Cooke (Dr. Fate), Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso (Dr. Mid-Nite), Howard Chaykin (Hourman), James Robinson and Tony Harris (Starman) and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon and Michael Lark (Mr. Terrific). Did we mention John Cassaday (*Captain America*, *Planetary*) on covers? "It's an unbelievable amount of talent," exclaims Johns. "[Editor] Pete Tomasi really put everything together. This is the best talent working today tackling the first superteam ever created."

IN ISSUE #1 (of 8) A brand-new incarnation of the Injustice Society shows up to destroy the JSA, and things don't look good for our Golden Age good guys. By Johns, Goyer, Sal Velluto, Bob Almond and the host of all-stars listed above. $2.50 (May 7)

ACTION COMICS (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL DC knows how to throw a birthday for its icons, as seen in *Action* #800, as a host of all-star artists provide montage scenes starring the Man of Steel that not only provide wonderful insights into his character, but also reflect the way Superman's affected the real world. Joe Kelly pens the moving script, while special guests Alex Ross, Tony Harris, Bill Sienkiewicz, Ed McGuinness, Tim Sale and Jim Lee (among others!) render unforgettable Superman moments.

IN ISSUE #803 Superman declares war on the forces plotting against the U.S. By Kelly, Pascual Ferry and Cam Smith. $2.25 (May 7)

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL J. Michael Straczynski keeps putting Spider-Man/Peter Parker in ridiculously entertaining predicaments. In issue #50, Peter and MJ get a chance to pour their hearts out to one another, only to be interrupted in the airport when terrorists attack a visiting Dr. Doom! Doom's run-in with the metal detector alone is worth the price of the comic.

IN ISSUE #53 Marvel's keeping story details under tighter wraps than MJ's outfits, but without the revealing panty lines. By Straczynski, John Romita Jr. and Scott Hanna. $2.25 (May 21)

AVENGERS (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Geoff Johns plays up individual characters in *Avengers* to much success, and his most recent subject had us soaring to new heights. Falcon's no longer "the token brother," thanks to his new kickass attitude and new powers (he can telepathically tap into the minds of any birds). We're hoping Falc will be roosting with the Avengers for a long time!

IN ISSUE #67 The Avengers are smack dab in the middle of a biological disaster on American soil, in Part 3 of "Red Zone," a story that Johns says "will really turn the Avengers inside out. Some developments between Black Panther and Iron Man have ranging repercussions," boasts the scribe. By Johns, Olivier Coipel and Andy Lanning. $2.25 (May 28)

BATGIRL: YEAR ONE (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL After seeing artist Marcos Martin's amazing, action-packed splash panels in issue #3, you'll feel like you just walked off the set of "The Matrix Reloaded!" This up-and-coming talent continues to build a solid résumé with his eye-popping work on this mini-series and we're hoping it's not too long before he's on a regular Bat-title.

MR TITLES DENOTED WITH AN MR CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT'S SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS.

IN ISSUE #6 (of 9) Batgirl meets her future Birds of Prey partner, Black Canary, for the first time. "Batgirl's the one Bat-character who doesn't come at this from having a parent murdered," explains co-writer Scott Beatty. "She's coming at it because she wants to, not because she has to. Her motivations are different, so it makes sense for Barbara to have an affinity for female crimefighters, like Black Canary." By Beatty, Chuck Dixon, Martin and Alvaro Lopez. **$2.95** (May 14)

BATMAN (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL If you're wondering about all the hoopla surrounding Jim Lee's return to comics, look no further than *Batman* #612 and the sensational splash page of Batman punching out the Man of Steel—with a little help from his kryptonite ring. With every issue of *Batman* that rolls out, Lee cements himself as the hottest—and most talented—penciler in comics.
IN BATMAN #615 Nightwing stops by in time for Batman to get a new ride, as an updated Batmobile rolls off the assembly line. By Jeph Loeb, Lee and Scott Williams. **$2.25** (May 28)

CAPTAIN AMERICA (Marvel Knights)

WHY IT'S COOL Super-stylized Jae Lee returns to the Marvel U. with his work on *Cap* #10, and all we can say is, "What took so long?" Lee's amazing art gives Cap—and villains like Red Skull, MODOK, Baron Blood and the Viper—a trippy, razor-sharp edge that simply blew our minds.
IN ISSUE #13 In part two of the "Ice" arc, Cap's memories come flooding back when a mysterious package arrives. By John Ney Rieber, Chuck Austen and Lee. **$2.99** (May 14)

CAPTAIN MARVEL (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL The madness that has inflicted Captain Marvel since this book relaunched has provided chilling moments of tense entertainment. Like in issue #6: Basking in the glow of destroying everything in the known universe, Marvel quips to Rick Jones, "All life...it was like a cancer, slowly eating away at the pure essence of everything...you should

newreleases

FIRST TIME OUT

ARKHAM ASYLUM: LIVING HELL #1 (OF 6) (DC) Warren White tries to beat jail time by pleading insanity, but that lands him in the most dangerous place in Gotham—Arkham Asylum, home for the criminally insane! $2.50 (May 21)

B.P.R.D.: THE SOUL OF VENICE (Dark Horse) Something's fouling up the water in Venice, as the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense tracks the trouble to an ancient vampire and a grand marque of Hell! $2.99 (May 14)

DEMONWARS: EYE FOR AN EYE #1 (OF 5) (CGE) The barbarian ranger Andecanavar travels to the far-off land of Behren where he investigates another ranger's death and tries to stop another demon war. $2.95 (May 7)

DOMINO #1 (OF 4) (Marvel) Domino, the mutant espionage agent, former X-Forcer and Cable's old flame, gets into international trouble in her own mini-series. $2.50 (May 14)

HUMAN DEFENSE CORPS #1 (OF 6) (DC) To combat forces the regular military can't deal with, President Luthor establishes the Human Defense Corps. Follow one recruit from his stint in boot camp to campaigns on the moon, Apokolips and even Hell! $2.50 (May 28)

INHUMANS #1 (Marvel) The next generation of Inhumans comes to Earth to learn about our cultures, but they run into opposition from humanity. $2.50 (May 28)

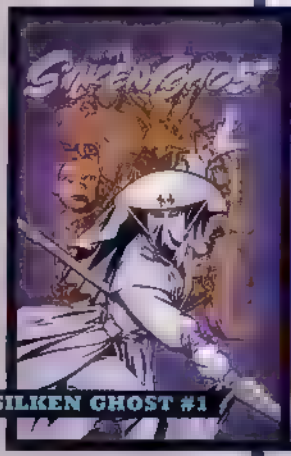
MISPLACED #1 (Image) A young girl named Alyssa flees her otherdimensional world called the Realm to take up residence in a small midwestern college town—but the Elders from the Realm want her back at all costs. $2.95 (May 14)

NEW MUTANTS #1 (Marvel) Former New Mutants, like Dani Moonstar (a.k.a. Mirage), become instructors for a new generation of up-and-coming mutants in this Tsunami release. $2.50 (May 21)

SCOOTER GIRL #1 (OF 6) (Oni Press) Ashton is the cool guy that all the girls want, but when he makes a play for the stunning Margaret, he gets the cold shoulder—and he doesn't like it one bit. $2.99 (May)

SILKEN GHOST #1 (OF 5) (CGE) Learn the secret history of the Silken Ghost, the ninja sidekick of *Way of the Rat*'s Boon Sai Hong. A crisis in the Temple of Ghosts calls home its five banished warriors to defend their master against an ancient evil. $2.95 (May 14)

THE CREW #1 (Marvel) In the aftermath of "The Truth," Jim Rhodes, the former War Machine, establishes a crew of crimefighters to help clean up the worst neighborhood in New York City. $2.50 (May 21)



THE TITANS/YOUNG JUSTICE: GRADUATION DAY #1-#3 (DC) The fates of both junior superteams will be decided when a cyborg assassin from the future comes calling—and killing! $2.50 each (May 14, May 28 and June 11)

TONY MILLIONAIRE'S SOCK MONKEY 4 #1 (OF 2) (Dark Horse) When Inches takes home a pet seahorse, it's up to Sock Monkey and Mr. Crow to help her out when other sea creatures come looking for their cohort. $2.99 (May 7)

WOLVERINE: SNIKT! #1 (OF 6) (Marvel) By manga superstar Tsutomu Nihei (*Blame!*), this mini-series sees Wolverine devolving into a more savage state against robotic, parasitic organisms, and the key to his survival is a mysterious young girl. $2.99 (May 7)

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OTHER UNDERCARDS ON SALE IN MAY:

DAREDEVIL VS. TYPHOID MARY!

DAREDEVIL #47 (Marvel) Ol' Hornhead's gonna need all his dad's boxing skills when he goes toe to toe with former Kingpin assassin, Typhoid Mary! $2.99 (May 21)

GREEN ARROW VS. BLACK LIGHTNING!

GREEN ARROW #2 (DC) A six-part arc by new writer Judd Winick (*Exiles*) kicks off, as Black Lightning comes to Star City with a chip on his shoulder that's got the Emerald Archer's name on it. $2.50 (May 21)

HARLEY QUINN VS. THE JOKER!

HARLEY QUINN #32 (DC) When Harley heads out for a night on the town in her civilian disguise, her old boyfriend the Joker rears his ugly head to put the kibosh on her good time! $2.50 (May 7)

HAWKMAN VS. HAWKWOMAN!

HAWKMAN #15 (DC) The feathers are sure to fly when Shayera Thal, the Thanagarian Hawkwoman, arrives in St. Roch with a mad-on against both of the Hawks! $2.50 (May 7)

JSA VS. THE THREE STOOGES!

[illegible] (DC) well okay–not *the* Three Stooges, but three stooges nonetheless. The epic "Princes of Darkness" storyline continues, as the JSA confronts a trio of deadly foes: Mordru, Obsidian and Eclipso! $2.50 (May 14)

BATGIRL VS. DEATHSTROKE THE TERMINATOR!

NIGHTWING #31 (DC) While Nightwing recovers from a bullet wound, it's up to Batgirl, the best martial artist in the DCU, to take on the deadly assassin known as Deathstroke, the Terminator–a man who's taken out the Dark Knight Detective! $2.25 (May 14)

GRUDGE MATCH: X-MEN VS. REV. STRYKER!

X-TREME X-MEN #25-#26 (Marvel) The X-Treme team reunites with Wolverine and Kitty Pryde to take on Rev. Stryker, their old foe from *God Loves, Man Kills* and the antagonist from the upcoming "X-Men 2"! $2.99 each (May 7 and 28, respectively)

be glad." One word for the crazy Captain: Prozac! "I like the notion that it's such a casual thing in the world of comic books, trying to destroy the universe," notes writer Peter David. "But you know what? Screw it!"

IN ISSUE #9-#10 Captain Marvel's got a new partner, who just happens to be a serial killer that wants Rick Jones dead! By David and Ivan Reis. $2.99 (May 7 and 21, respectively)

CRIMINAL MACABRE (Dark Horse)

WHY IT'S COOL If you like having the pants scared off of you, you'll wanna pick up this fear-inducing title: the follow-up to last year's surprise smash hit—*30 Days of Night*, the Alaskan vampire scare-fest by Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith. This time around, a private investigator goes up against the elite werewolves and vampires of L.A.!

IN ISSUE #1 (of 5) P.I. Cal McDonald relocates to L.A. with his zombie sidekick Mo'lock to hobnob with all manner of weird creatures! By Niles and Templesmith. $2.99 (May 14)

CAPTAIN MARVEL #9

DARKNESS (Top Cow)

WHY IT'S COOL Dale Keown's dark, disturbing imagery will make you go screaming into the night—if you dare read it while it's dark! Check out the last panel of issue #2 for a jolt that'll stop your heart: three bloodied assassins, looking like they just stepped off the "Hellraiser" lot, welcoming Jackie with a severed head! Couldn't they have just brought a cake?

IN ISSUE #4 Jackie tries to get back in with the mob family he came up with. By Paul Jenkins and Keown. $2.99 (May)

DETECTIVE COMICS (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL The Clown Prince of Crime, the Joker, has been laying low, but he rears his smiling face in *Tec* #780 to our reading delight. When Batman's trying to discover which of his rogues planned a group assault to take him down, he's gotta have a sit-down with the Joker to get the scoop—and we're guessin' there won't be tea and cookies served!

IN ISSUE #782 "Dead Reckoning" concludes, as the Charlatan and Batman battle at Arkham Asylum for the fate of Harvey Dent. By Ed Brubaker, Jason Hall, Tommy Castillo, Wade Von Grawbadger, Craig Rousseau and Dan Davis. **$2.75** (May 7)

EXILES (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Tony Stark's always been a bit of a bastard, but under writer Judd Winick, he's been transformed into the ultimate supervillain. In this timeline, Stark's become absolute monarch of Earth after years of devious planning, but his next move could be his most vile achievement yet: He wants to use the Inhumans to create an army that will allow him to take over the galaxy! "Bring on the bad guys!" exclaims Winick. "Tony Stark turns out to be a real big bad, and he's getting helped by Weapon X and a dirty, filthy Gambit."

IN ISSUES #26-#27 How will new recruit Illyana Rasputin fit in with her teammates? By Chuck Austen, Clayton Henry and Mark Morales. **$2.99** each (May 7 and 21, respectively)

FANTASTIC FOUR (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL If all Mark Waid did was have 22 pages of Ben Grimm mucking with a shrink ray, we'd still be all over this book like white on rice. Check out the hilarious sequence in *FF* #66 that sees Ben getting shrunk to midget-size to fight a bug from the Negative Zone, then enlarged to twice his normal size when he can't handle the bug, then shrunk back to atom-size when he starts fiddling with the device!

IN ISSUE #69 The Fantastic Four go after Doom when the Latverian dictator starts picking on the Richards' children. By Waid, Mike Wieringo and Karl Kesel. **$2.25** (May 28)

FLASH (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL Writer Geoff Johns has made villains his forte in *Flash*, but issue #195 ups the evil quotient to the Nth degree! After the recent breakout at the meta-human prison called Iron Heights, no less than 17 Rogues threaten Keystone City, start-

HARTATTACK

BONEYARD TURNS 13!

The Boneyard's about to get a lot livelier this summer.

Boneyard Press (www.boneyardpress.com), the brainchild of outspoken comic creator and burgeoning porn producer Hart D. Fisher, celebrates its 13th anniversary, and to promote the milestone, Boneyard's got a host of events planned. Starting in May, look for a *Ginger Hill Attacks!* one-shot starring the noted porn actress (www.gingerhill.com, if you're over 18) and a DVD of behind-the-scenes convention antics titled "Boneyard Bitches Gone Wild!" (There's tons more coming up besides: check the Website for more details on all things Boneyard.)

Out of the comics loop for over two years, Fisher is best remembered for his controversial Jeffrey Dahmer comics, his *Rush Limbaugh Must Die!* one-shot and a public battle with Marvel Comics over its distribution practices that saw Fisher print up X-rated T-shirts proclaiming what Marvel could do with a certain portion of his anatomy.

We sat down with Fisher to get the full scoop on what he's been up to, and what's going on with Boneyard.

WHERE DO YOU AND BONEYARD FIT INTO THE COMICS SCENE?

My work provokes people. I really believe that if you're going to scare somebody you'd better go all the way. I'm just doing it to have some fun and raise some hell and keep a lot of my intellectual properties alive. I'm not in it for the money. I make more money doing poetry than I do doing comics.

HOW WILL YOU PLAY UP THE 13TH ANNIVERSARY?

We're just trying to celebrate that we're still here. I've been here longer than most other people. Who's still around from the old days. Is First Comics? Is Jim Shooter even in the business anymore? No, I think he's like working at a nursing home somewhere. We really want to shove it down the publics' throat–we don't have a lot of money, but we're having more fun than anybody else. As part of the anniversary celebration, we're going to auction off a night with the Boneyard Bitches at the summer cons, and that will be a lot of fun. Drinking, dancing and a little bit of caning, a little bit of bondage.

WILL FLUIDS WILL BE EXCHANGED?

Yeah, it could be pouring tequila shots on a girl's breasts for a little nipple shooter. It depends on the night, it depends on the girls. If I guarantee something like that, that's prostitution. It's up to the girl whether or not they enjoy their slave, because essentially, that's what you're going to be.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU HAVE COMING UP THIS YEAR?

We signed a deal with the Micro Wrestling Federation, and we're doing a comic called *Midget Apocalypse*. We've got the continuing series *Zombie Commandos from Hell* and *Psycho Hunter*, which cross over in October. We're relaunching *Flowers on the Razorwire*, our erotic anthology series, we've got *Book of Legion* with Ryan Mojica and a novel called *Sex Crime* with Chantong Monks Press that features Bernie Wrightson (*Swamp Thing*) illustrations!

WHAT WERE YOU DOING THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS?

I finished my horror film "The Garbage Man." It's something that I shot in the midst of the Jeffrey Dahmer controversy. I spent a lot of time cleaning up my finances and my personal life. I went through bankruptcy. And I'm married now, so I'm coming at this with a rededicated focus and desire to create good work. I wrote a lot of smut. I wrote for a lot of adult magazines. I've written and directed several adult films. And I've worked in the adult industry as a graphic designer for Vivid and Legend.

ANY "FRINGE BENEFITS" WORKING IN PORN?

Actually, no. That's the funny thing. I met more of my babes in bars. I really never nailed a porn chick.

LAST QUESTION: WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO CLEAN MY RUBBER G-STRING?

[*Laughs*] Straight up soap and water! ■ ANDY SERWIN

ing with the Top, who shows up to give Flash a bad case of the spins (worse than doing Jagr shots)!
IN ISSUE #198 The psychotic Zoom targets the Flash's running buddies, like Jay Garrick and Jesse Quick. By Johns, Scott Kolins and Doug Hazlewood. **$2.25** (May 28)

JLA (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL We can't help but notice how lovely Wonder Woman's been looking in *JLA*, so we've gotta give props to Doug Mahnke for his unique take on the Amazonian Princess. His renderings add a look of authority, ethnicity and dare we say, sex appeal, to Wonder Woman. And the way she tucks her hair behind her ear in issue #78...*sigh*...puppy love hasn't been this strong since third grade.
IN ISSUE #81 When the original Leaguers face a murder rap, it's up to three new recruits, John Stewart/Green Lantern, Faith and Manitou Raven, to save the day. "'White Rage' explores some of the newer characters and their personal stuff within the League," explains writer Joe Kelly. By Kelly, Duncan Rouleau and Aaron Sowd. **$2.25** (May 28)

NEW X-MEN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL If you're looking for hot mutant lust, forget Skinemax; pick up *New X-Men* #138! Squashing the mutant uprising at the school must make the teachers horny, as Cyclops and White Queen share some intimate mental moments—with Emma dressed as Dark Phoenix, no less—until Mrs. Summers, a.k.a. Jean Grey, walks in.
IN ISSUE #141 "Murder at the Mansion" concludes, as Bishop and Sage uncover the murderer's identity. By Grant Morrison, Phil Jimenez and Andy Lanning. **$2.25** (May 21)

PUNISHER (Marvel Knights)

WHY IT'S COOL Writer Garth Ennis hasn't lost his touch when it comes to crafting the absurd. In *Punisher* #23, Punny becomes the target of a mobster—who's obsessed with giant squid—after Castle puts his crew on ice. Just as this Mafioso is about to plug Punisher full of lead, the giant squid he's been searching for drags the mobster to a watery grave! You *never* see sh— like that on the Discovery Channel!
IN ISSUE #26-#27 Two issues ship this month, as Punisher wraps up his "Hidden" adventure before Elektra drops in for a guest appearance. By Ennis, Tom Mandrake and Steve Dillon. **$2.99** each (May 14 and 28, respectively)

SOJOURN (CrossGen)

WHY IT'S COOL Every issue we see by Greg Land causes us to fall deeper in love with the beautiful archer called Arwyn. Check out the sequence on pages 20-22 of issue #20, as Arwyn realizes her pal Gareth is still alive—she goes from puzzled, to radiant to pissed off in the course of three panels, all rendered in gorgeous detail by Land.
IN ISSUE #23 While Arwyn and company traverse the desert wasteland of Oudubai, they're bedeviled by nomads. By Ron Marz, Land and Jay Leisten. **$2.95** (May 14)

SUPERMAN (DC)

WHY IT'S COOL Superman's powers take on a whole new perspective when he's matched up against regular folks, as in issue #190. After dispatching a berserk robot, a crowd of well-wishers bombards the Man of Steel, but before zooming off, Superman instructs one guy to head for a doctor because of a blocked artery in his heart! That X-ray vision comes in handy for more than just peeping at Lois.
IN ISSUE #193 While battling the menace called Radion, the future Supergirl may wind up destroying Metropolis. By Steven Seagle, Scott McDaniel and Andy Owens. **$2.25** (May 28)

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL No one captures teen angst like Brian Michael Bendis. Check out the heartfelt exchange between Peter and Mary Jane in issue #37—Bendis nails the awkwardness of teen love with spot-on dialogue, but the moments of silence hammer home the flowing emotions. Scenes like these make us glad high school is far behind us.
IN ISSUE #40-#41 A new storyarc kicks off that introduces the first original villain into the Ultimate Universe. By Bendis, Mark Bagley and Art Thibert. **$2.25** each (May 7, 21)

ULTIMATE X-MEN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL David Finch's artwork has looked spectacular during his *Ultimate X-Men* run, and he really hits readers with his final splash page in issue #30—an extreme close-up of Magneto, eyes narrowed to hawk-like slits, jaw set in determination, helmet sporting cracks from his battle with the X-Men—as he announces that he's just destroyed a nuclear power plant in Miami. A perfect blend of words and imagery!
IN ISSUE #33 It's the final chapter in the "Return of the King" storyline. By Mark Millar, Adam Kubert and Danny Miki. **$2.25** (March 14)

ULTIMATES (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL Mark Millar's snappy, ironic dialogue makes this notoriously late-shipping title worth the wait. Check out the great exchange in issue #9—prepping for battle with an alien invasion force, Black Widow asks Tony Stark, "Do you really think it is wise to knock back so many vodkas before you fly that thing?" to which Tony replies, "Who in their right

THEMOORETHEMERRIER

Alan Moore's made his reputation as one of the most brilliant writers ever to work in comics, but he's also known for being fiercely private and media shy.

Until now. Starting this May, Moore's profile spikes to an all-time high, not only because of the host of Moore projects hitting stores this month, but because of the *nature* of one of the items in particular: an official Alan Moore Portrait Litho by Top Shelf Productions (Regular edition–$20, signed edition–$40).

We talked to both Moore and photographer/artist Jose Villarrubia to get their takes on producing this curious collectible.

1 PLAYING DOOR MAN "He's got a custom-made door on his house in Northampton, which sports his symbol of the avatar," explains Villarrubia. "Two intertwined serpents rising up to the moon, which is actually a porthole window. The moon I added in digitally to make it more dramatic."

2 PICTURE PERFECT "I think the world would be a much better place if it were wallpapered with pictures of me," says a tongue-in-cheek Moore. "I think there'd probably be less war and more happiness."

3 FAMILY MATTERS "I spent a few days in Northampton with him and [wife] Melinda," recalls Villarrubia. "I photographed him for an upcoming project called *Voice of the Fire*, because he's a character for the last chapter of the book. I took some nice portraits of him, him with Melinda and Melinda by herself. We took shots in different places and went for different moods, and it took place over the course of four or five hours."

4 CAMERA SHY? "He was very easy to work with, he loved being photographed," proclaims Villarrubia. "He's a very imposing person, very tall, he's got a unique look, and he's very powerful. And he has a really good sense of what to do in front of the camera. I let him do what was natural. I gave him some direction, but he took it from there. I think it was a lot of fun for him."

5 COMPUTER WHIZ "All of my photography is digitally manipulated in Photoshop," notes Villarrubia. "All those runes that you see on the image will be done in a matte varnish, so you'll see them from an angle when the light hits it right."

6 THE MAN IN BLACK "He's got some dramatic clothing that he likes to wear when he goes out," says Villarrubia. "He's got a cane, he likes to wear those rings for dressing up. But we settled on something very simple: black jeans, black T-shirt and black army boots with metal studs. It's very much a 'rock' look."

7 THE SCORPIO KING "I asked him about the symbolism of the rings, and one of them is a scorpion, which is important to him because he's a Scorpio," recounts Villarrubia. "We're actually born one day apart! His birthday (November 18) is very important to him because of his magical practice, and he refers to the date a lot in his writing. I always thought it was kind of neat his birthday was the day after mine."

8 ARMOR ALL "The jewelry isn't very important," notes Moore. "At a certain age in life, it pays to draw attention away from one's face. [The armor piece] looked like I'd had some terrible comic book accident and had to have a finger replaced with bionics. And my arms are gradually getting longer. Often at dusk, you'll find me loping along the cobbled back alleys in the twilight with my knuckles scraping along the ground, shearing up sparks in the gloom. [*Laughs*] It's nothing more than vanity with the rings."

AND BE SURE TO CHECK OUT THESE OTHER ALAN MOORE PROJECTS SHIPPING IN MAY!

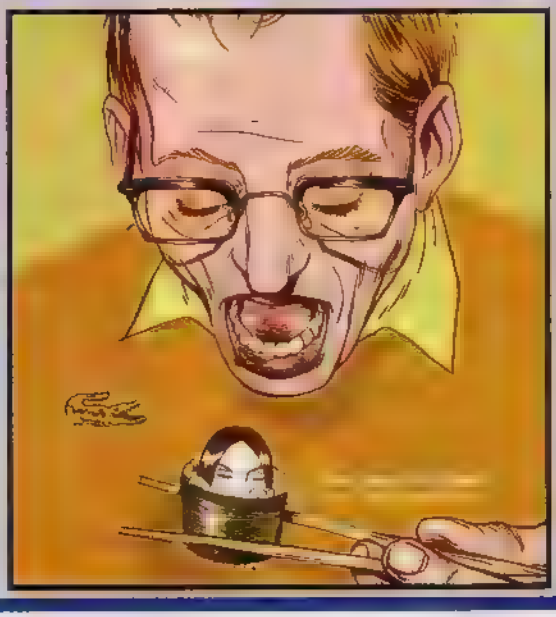
ALAN MOORE: PORTRAIT OF AN EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMAN (Abiogenesis Press) Over 100 contributors provide comic strips, illustrations, stories, essays, tributes and photos celebrating Alan Moore's voluminous work in comics, and all net profits from the sale of this book will be donated to Alzheimer's disease charities. $14.95 (May)

A SMALL KILLING (Avatar Press) This graphic novel poses the question, "How much damage can be done by a small killing?" as adman Tim Kole discovers when he lands a big assignment to market a major cola company in Russia. But things begin to unravel for Tim when a demonic child begins stalking his every move. MR. SC–$16.95, HC–$24.95 (May)

PROMETHEA BOOK 3 (WildStorm/DC) Promethea and Barbara embark on a cosmic road trip that takes them through Heaven and Hell, while back on Earth, Stacia protects New York as the acting Promethea. $14.95 (May 21)

THE MANY WORLDS OF TESLA STRONG (WildStorm/DC) When Tom Strong's simian sidekick Solomon goes missing, it's up to Tom's daughter, Tesla, to scour the multiverse to find him. $5.95 (May 14)

TOP SHELF: ASKS THE BIG QUESTIONS (Top Shelf) The works of a host of foreign and domestic cartoonists can be found in this volume (**below**), which includes the Alan Moore/Melinda Gebbie story "La Toile" (*The Web*), which was never published in Moore's *Tomorrow Stories*. $24.95 (May)



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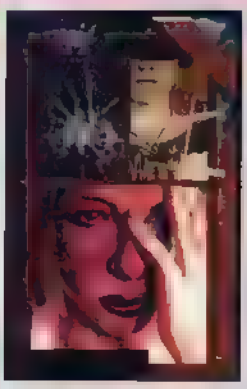


Brian Michael Bendis (see p. 88) harbors secrets about Jessica Jones, star of his Marvel/MAX book *Alias*, and starting this month, he's dishing the dirt!

In *Alias* #22 (on sale May 7 for $2.99), readers will finally learn the secret origin of how the former-superheroine-turned-private investigator received her superpowers—and the answer will utterly shock you!

"It's pretty intense," boasts Bendis of the ish, which guest stars Spider-Man and Galactus. "It deals with a lot of Marvel stuff that's rarely addressed. It's one of those those things that comes back to haunt her. She was faced with a Marvel villain whose powers are really horrifying if handled right."

Be sure to check out these other great mature readers' books shipping in May!

AUTHORITY VOL. 2 #1 (WildStorm/DC) The title that rocked the superhero genre returns, this time under new creators Robbie Morrison and Dwayne Turner. The Authority intervenes in a secret war that's been raging for decades after an alien power attacks cities all over the globe. MR. $2.95 (May 7)

BLOOD AND WATER #3 (OF 5) (Vertigo/DC) Adam's enjoying his life as a vampire, living it up in a never-ending orgy of blood and sex. But an ancient evil wants to crash the party…and Adam's new undead existence! MR. $2.95 (May 14)

CVO: COVERT VAMPIRIC OPERATIONS (IDW) The CIA organizes a special branch to deal with the most dangerous threats. The only requirement? You've gotta be a vampire to join! MR. $5.99 (May)

FABLES #13 (Vertigo/DC) Bigby Wolf and his motley "crew" must stop a ruthless reporter from spilling the beans on the Fables' existence. You know what goes good with beans? Hot dogs! MR. $2.50 (May 14)

HELLBLAZER #184 (Vertigo/DC) John Constantine visits South America with his friend Angie in search of the "shadow dog" they're after, but the pair wind up in a very high-stakes poker game. MR. $2.75 (May 28)

LURID #3 (IDW) In a story called "Bust," trouble comes calling at Club Lurid which leads to a broken jaw… and a dead body in the dumpster at back! Isn't there any-place more original to dispose of a corpse these days? MR. $2.99 (May)

100 BULLETS #44 (Vertigo/DC) Loop Hughes is having a tough time adjusting to prison life, as he's caught between a rock and a hard place in the guise of a psychotic thug and a guard with a chip on his shoulder. MR. $2.50 (May 7)

POWERS #32 (Image) The origins of the Powers are finally revealed, and the secrets span thousands of years, all tied to the mysterious entity known as "Forever Man." MR. $2.95 (May 21)

QUEEN & COUNTRY #16 (Oni) The department faces trouble at home and abroad, as the Minders undergo a change in their ranks, while in the former Soviet Union, Lasha Karpin gets kidnapped. MR. $2.99 (May)

THE MARQUIS: A SIN OF ONE #1 (Oni) While the Marquis continues his vendetta against the escaped souls of Hell, he races to stop a killer in a small village who uses the townspeople as his instruments of death. MR. $2.99 (May)

THREE STRIKES #2 (OF 5) (Oni) Bail bondsman Noah Conway reluctantly tracks teenage bail jumper Rey Quintana all across the state, but if Conway's not careful, he could wind up dead. MR. $2.99 (May)

Y—THE LAST MAN #11 (Vertigo/DC) A new storyline kicks off that finds Yorick and his crew speeding cross-country on a train when a strange visitor from another world drops in. Could it be another "man"? MR. $2.95 (May 21)

mind's going to climb into it sober?"

IN ISSUE #10 The Ultimates discover that secrets to the alien invasion lie somewhere in Captain America's past. By Mark Millar, Bryan Hitch and Paul Neary. $2.25 (May 28)

UNCANNY X-MEN (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL The Uncanny team are no longer the feel-good mutant family Charles Xavier envisioned, and that makes for serious entertainment. Take issue #419—you've got Polaris threatening nurse Annie, Juggernaut's ready to rip Polaris' face off, Northstar and Iceman biting each other's head off and the Dominant Species ready to feast on all the X-entrails. We're hoping writer Chuck Austen keeps tightening the screws!

IN ISSUE #423-#424 New team leader Nightcrawler wrestles with his inner demons. By Austen and Ron Garney. #423—25 cents, #424—$2.25 (May 7 and 21, respectively)

USAGI YOJIMBO (Dark Horse)

WHY IT'S COOL Stan Sakai's sleight-of-hand storytelling would make David Blaine feel like an amateur magician. In *Usagi* #64, Usagi runs across a kindly looking, good-natured monk who joins him on his journey. As it turns out, the inconspicuous monk is actually a member of the League of Assassins—and their next target is Usagi himself!

IN ISSUE #66 Sakai kicks off a tribute to giant Japanese monsters. By Sakai. $2.99 (May 28)

VOLTRON: DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE (Image)

WHY IT'S COOL Giant robots rock, but giant robots in the shape of lions that transform into an even bigger robot rock hardest! Voltron, that staple of after-school cartoon programming, comes to comics courtesy of Image and Devil's Due, who've made the G.I. Joe franchise one of the hottest revivals in comics. If Voltron is half as successful, Image will own a "lion's share" of the marketplace!

IN ISSUE #0 Dreamwave Productions chips in with art for this one-shot, which whets your appetite for Voltron by introducing the five pilots who will bring the robot to life. By Dan Jolley, Dreamwave and Mark Brooks. $2.50 (May 7)

IN ISSUE #1 (of 5) With Earth and the Galactic Union embroiled in a space-spanning war, five maverick pilots undergo a dangerous mission to find the legendary war machine called Voltron. By Dan Jolley, Mike Norton, Clint Hilinski and Clayton Brown. $2.95 (May 28)

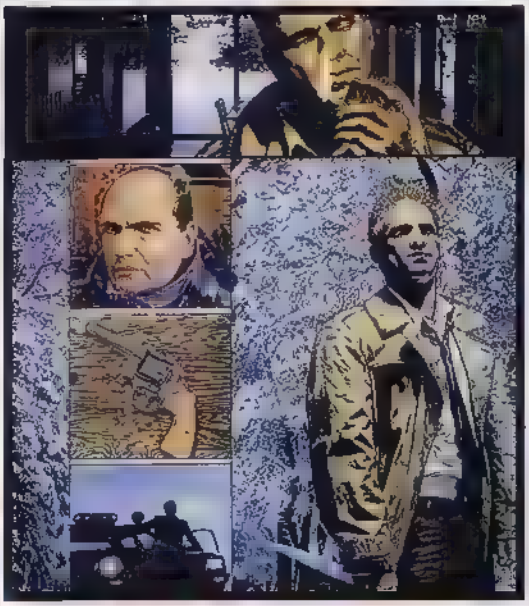
WOLVERINE (Marvel)

WHY IT'S COOL The hottest talent (writer Greg Rucka and artist Danck Robertson) combined with the X-Men's No. 1 character (Wolverine—duh!) equals fan appeal so hot it'll scorch the sun! And you know there's gonna be buzz, 'cuz *Wizard* ran a 22-page preview two months back! If you want your Wolverine down and dirty, this relaunch is a must-have!

IN ISSUE #1 When a young girl he befriends gets murdered, Logan's out for justice. "In his free time, Wolverine goes after the scum trying to slip under the radar, the real skanky human ones," notes Rucka. "We're talking about the guy who wants to take pictures of your daughter. Those are the people that Wolverine holds a very special claw for." By Rucka and Robertson. $2.25 (May 21)

tradingpost

You wanted 'em, you asked for 'em and now you got 'em–trade paperbacks out the ying-yang! Go nuts; there's something here for everyone!



HELLBLAZER: FREEZES OVER (Vertigo/DC)

WHY IT'S COOL Quite possibly Brian Azzarello's most riveting arc during his amazing *Hellblazer* run, "Freezes Over" finds mystical con man John Constantine stuck in a roadside diner with an interesting array of colorful characters–some crazed gunmen, a host of frightened hostages . and one possible serial killer called "The Iceman," all rendered in wonderfully sinister detail thanks to the haunting artwork of Marcelo Frusin. Collects *Hellblazer* issues #157–#163.

BOTTOM LINE If you're looking to chill with a bone-numbingly scary tale, *Hellblazer: Freezes Over* by two-time *Wizard* Best Writer Azzarello, puts all other comers on ice. By Azzarello and Frusin. **MR. $14.95** (May 14)

BEST OF SPIDER-MAN VOL. 2 HC (Marvel) J. Michael Straczynski and Paul Jenkins provide the bulk of stories found in this collection, which repackages the best of Spider-Man from *Amazing, Peter Parker* and *Tangled Web*. **$29.99** (May 14)

DAREDEVIL VOL. 6: LOWLIFE (Marvel) While dealing with the dilemma of his revealed secret identity, Matt Murdock finds new love and an old enemy comes calling to the New York underworld. Collects *DD* #41–#45. **$13.99** (May 21)

DORK VOL. 2: CIRCLING THE DRAIN (Amaze Ink/SLG) Evan Dorkin's hilarious non-Eltingville material, plus a host of colored extras, get collected from *Dork* issues #7 #10. **$13.95** (May)

G.I. JOE VOL. 3: MALFUNCTION (Image) In this volume collecting issues #10–#15, the Joes combat Cobra's mechanical soldiers known as B.A.T.s, while a quartet of Joes find their homecoming interrupted by Cobra party crashers! **$12.95** (May 14)

JLA: OBSIDIAN AGE BOOK ONE (DC) The "Hunt for Aquaman" from issues #66–#71 finds the JLA searching through time for their missing comrade, and also introduces two new members of the League the mysterious Faith and the shaman called Manitou Raven. **$12.95** (May 14)

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ARCHIVES VOL. 8 HC (DC) Collecting classic issues of the first *JLA* series, this hardcover contains the first League works by writers Dick Dillin and Denny O'Neil. **$49.95** (May 7)

NEW X-MEN VOL. 4: RIOT AT XAVIER'S (Marvel) When a group of radical students–led by the super-genius known as Kid Omega–begin bucking the system at Xavier' School, it'll take more than a slap on the wrist to stop the rebellion. Collects *New X-Men* #134–#138. **$11.99** (May 14)

POWERS VOL. IV: SUPERGROUP (Image) Detectives Pilgrim and Walker investigate a murder involving the world's premier superteam, a federal cover-up and secrets involving Powers that are better left hidden. **MR. $19.95** (May 14)

PRIVATE BEACH VOL. 2: SECRET MESSAGES (Amaze Ink/SLG) Collecting the first six issues of the regular series, which stars Trudy, a smart, sexy woman with a penchant for getting into trouble and attracting all manner of bizarre characters. **$13.95** (May)

RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT (Dark Horse) Collects a host of stories featuring subjects ranging from the bizarre to the unexplained, including vanishing cities, death-defying humans and biological oddities. **$9.95** (May 21)

SIGIL VOL. 4: HOSTAGE PLANET (CrossGen) The humans of the Planetary Union finally have a super-weapon to use in their war against the vile Saurians–grizzled soldier Samandarii Rey, who now wields the power of the omnipotent Sigil! **$15.95** (May 21)

SOJOURN VOL. 3: THE WARRIOR'S TALE (CrossGen) On the trail of the Five Fragments of Ayden's bow, Arwyn and her companion Gareth travel to a land whose inhabitants possess wings but are grounded by the troll army. **$15.95** (May 21)

STAR WARS: A LONG TIME AGO...VOL 6: WOOKIEE WORLD (Dark Horse) Issues #82–#95 of the classic Marvel series get collected, as Princess Leia battles a Stormtrooper, Lando helps an old flame and gets caught in civil war while Han and Chewie embark on a treasure hunt. **$29.95** (May 21)

THE BURNING BLUE ILLUSTRATED SCREENPLAY (Crusade) Billy Tucci's screenplay tells the story of a pilot with early Alzheimer's and a divorced teacher uniting through their love of flight. **$19.99** (May)

THE COMPLETE GEISHA (Oni) Jomi's an android artist who's more normal than the real people around her, and while searching for a soul, she's gotta deal with stalkers, supermodels and the super-mecha of her futuristic world. **$15.95** (May)

TRANSMETROPOLITAN: DIRGE (Vertigo/DC) A nameless sniper sets his sights on the Print District, while a raging storm blows clean the streets of The City, in this collection of *Transmet* #43–#48. **MR. $14.95** (May 21)

UNCANNY X-MEN VOL. 2: DOMINANT SPECIES (Marvel) Kia Asamiya's first arc as *Uncanny* artist (#416–#420) get collected, as Juggernaut joins the team, the roster gets a facelift, and a new menace called the Dominant Species makes the scene. **$11.99** (May 21)

XENOZOIC TALES (Dark Horse) Jack Tenrec and Hannah Dundee battle the reborn dinosaurs and other militant human factions for the fate of the ruined human cities. **$14.95** (May 28)

'NET GAINS

TURNER UP THE HEAT

Exclusive Mike Turner convention book leads crop of hot summer comics

Mike Turner's tired of fans giving him money. He really wants what money can't buy—undivided attention.

Turner—who recently started up his own publishing company, Aspen Entertainment—plans to give away a limited number of either *Dragonfly* or *Ekos* special edition comics at Wizard World East 2003 in Philadelphia (May 30-June 1), depending on which comic fans pick to be the artist's next project. (See the Mike Turner contest update on p. 28.)

According to Turner, the preview comic, which will contain six to eight pages of all-new story and art along with numerous design sketches and interviews, will not be sold to retailers or at the Aspen Entertainment convention booth.

"We're giving each retailer [who attends Wizard World East] one copy of the book," said Turner. "Then anyone who shows up for the Aspen panel, where we announce which book I'll be working on next, will also get a copy." Taking Turner's distribution methods into account, it's doubtful the print run for the book will exceed 500 copies!

Turner will also launch *Aspen* #1 at Philly. The three-issue series (featuring 12 pages of story in each issue, along with sketches and interviews) will be the creator's last Fathom story for the foreseeable future.

"It's going to be one huge 36-page story that Geoff [Johns] and I are writing. I'm drawing it and it's going to lead into a whole new world of *Fathom*," expounds Turner. "It's tying up some loose ends from the old stuff and leads into the *Fathom* mini-series that Talent Caldwell [*Fathom: Killian's Tide*] is drawing before he launches a new ongoing series this fall."

With its seemingly non-existent print run, Turner's convention preview comic should prove to be one of the hottest items at this year's big summer shows (Wizard World Chicago and the San Diego Comic Con). Here are a few others that look to be blazing hot.

H-E-R-O #1 & #2 (DC, currently $4 and $2.50, respectively)

The premiere issues of this new series had incredibly small print runs, but word of mouth caused them to sell out soon after they hit stands. DC scrambled to rush out a bumper reprint of the first two books and retailers have already increased orders on subsequent issues. This is exactly how *Y—The Last Man* played out last year!

HULK #1B & #1C (Marvel, currently $8 and $10, respectively)

With the movie pummeling theaters, new collectors will be seeking a collectible Hulk book at conventions. Since the original *Incredible Hulk* #1 is way too expensive, expect many to jump on the current run's first issue. "The sunburst cover [#1B] and Dynamic Forces Gold cover [#1C] will be $50 by the time the movie comes out," predicts Bill Jay of Jay Company, one of the savviest dealers on the convention circuit.

THE MATRIX (Warner Bros., currently $5)

The two Matrix sequels are potentially the biggest movies coming out this summer. Warner Bros. distributed this comic (reprinting several of the strips that appeared on the official Matrix website) to theaters in limited amounts in 1999. This year, fans are sure to unearth this gem, especially since one of its stories appears on the "Animatrix" DVD!

Don't wait until convention season—pick up these books, pronto! ■ MIKE COTTON & KARL CRAMER

WHO CAN IT BE NOW? Either Mike Turner's *Dragonfly* (above) or *Ekos* will appear in his Philly-exclusive comic, which will be super-hot along with *H-E-R-O* #1 and *Hulk* #1.

TERRIBLE TWO: R.I.P.

Marvel has something terrible in store for Terrible Two issues.

Underordered second issues disappear from shelves early and turn up later with a hefty price tag. Now, at least under a new ordering policy from Marvel that kicked off in April, readers have a better chance of obtaining hard-to-find second issues as retailers now have up to 20 days prior to the on-sale date to set their order numbers.

"Instead of retailers having to order books two or three months in advance, and then placing advance re-orders, we have one date they have to place their orders by," said Mike Doran, Marvel's marketing and communications manager.

Prior to the new policy, placing orders months in advance of the on-sale date could prove tricky if a series suddenly became hot. The classic example is *Ultimates* #2. Retailers placed "blind" orders for issue #1, gambling on how many copies they would sell. Unaware of how successful that issue would be, they slashed their orders for the second issue. Supply couldn't meet demand, resulting in an instant high-priced collectible. The same phenomenon has been seen recently with *Ultimate War* #2 and *Rawhide Kid* #2.

But under the new policy, "A first issue will now have been on sale for more than a week [when orders for the second issue are due]," said Doran, "so there's plenty of time to gauge reader interest in a title."

Getting hard-to-find second and third issues isn't usually a problem with other companies since DC (among others) overprints their books substantially to accommodate re-orders. That doesn't mean DC hasn't had a run on a scarce #2 issue. Early issues of *Fables* and *Y—The Last Man* are near impossible to find, and DC recently sold out its entire print run of *H-E-R-O* #2. ■ JIM AREHART

UP TO BAT

DC's *Batman* has held the top spot on the Diamond chart for three straight months and looks to go the distance once again in April. With all of Marvel's high-profile projects in the pipeline, can one of them KO the champ?

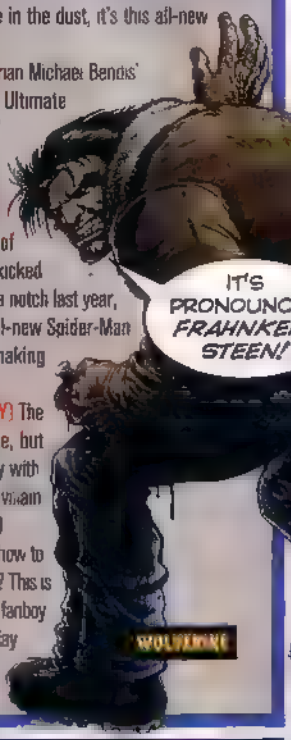
WOLVERINE #1 (MAY) One of the hottest writers in comics (Greg Rucka) sinking his claws into arguably the hottest character in comics? If any book can leave the Batmobile in the dust, it's this all-new #1. **ODDS: 2-1**

ULTIMATE X-MEN #34 (JUNE) Brian Michael Bendis' first issue aboard as writer teams Ultimate Spider-Man with the hot-off-"X2" muties. Fans have been dyin' to see Bendis on the X-Men. **ODDS: 3-1**

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #1 (JULY) While the fan-favorite team of Paul Jenkins and Humberto Ramos kicked *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*'s sales up a notch last year, even their combined efforts on an all-new Spider-Man #1 issue will have a tough time making Batman sweat. **ODDS: 6-1**

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #39 (MAY) The Venom storyline is all said and done, but Bendis introduces an all-new bad guy with this issue. Unfortunately, a mystery villain adds up to mystery sales. **ODDS: 8-1**

MARVILLE #7 (MAY) Wanna know how to get Marvel/Epic to publish your comic? This is the only place to find out...until some fanboy posts the entry rules on the Net a day later. Bats has more to fear from *Aunt Harriet Secret Files* #1. **ODDS: 50-1**



UPS & DOWNS

JLA After climbing the charts for several months, DC's big guns finally re-entered the Top 10 sellers after 18 months with March's issue #79. It seems fans dig writer Joe Kelly and artist Doug Mahnke's new line-up (featuring newcomers Faith, Major Disaster and Manitou Raven) and the interesting smooch recently shared between Batman and Wonder Woman.

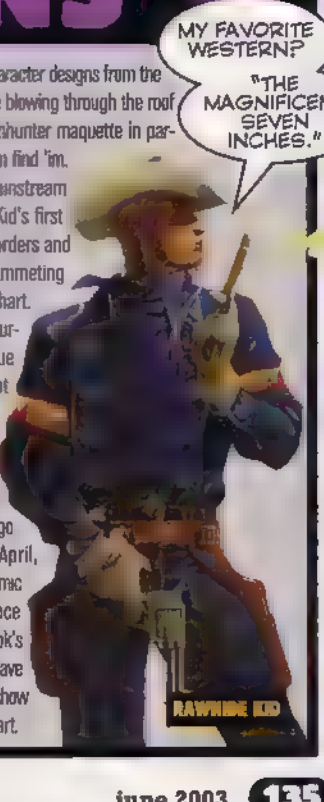
CAPTAIN AMERICA: WHAT PRICE GLORY Marvel released all four issues of the Bruce Jones/Steve Rude mini-series in March and reaped the benefits as all four issues landed in the Top 50 at $2.99 a pop! Marvel should see a lot more red, white and green as a trade paperback seems likely to emerge over the summer.

MARVEL UNIVERSE: THE END Speaking of Marvel mini-series success, writer/artist Jim Starlin's *Marvel Universe: The End* practically came storming out of the abyss, with issues #1 and #2 of the six-issue mini claiming the No. 15 and 17 sales slots (respectively) on the Top 50 chart. Fans still love those universe-spanning crossovers, especially when they involve the death of an entire universe, apparently.

JUSTICE LEAGUE MAQUETTES Even though the statue and bust market continues to struggle, DC Direct's Justice League maquettes (based off of the character designs from the "Justice League" animated series) are blowing through the roof on the back market! The Martian Manhunter maquette in particular is an easy $250 item, if you can find 'im.

RAWHIDE KID After a huge mainstream push from Marvel, the Saddle-sore Kid's first issue garnered disappointing initial orders and issue #2 continued the trend by plummeting a whopping 39 slots on the sales chart. However, with the first issue selling surprisingly well, expect the second issue (which is in scant supply) to be hot head on the back market.

ACCURATE SALES TO THE The Diamond sales charts (seen every month in the Top 50), once based solely on initial retailer orders, will soon undergo a massive overhaul. Beginning in April, Diamond Distribution will track actual comic sales, combining initial orders, advance reorders and reorders following a book's release. Many DC and Image books have substantial reorders, so expect them to show sturdier sales legs on the Diamond chart.

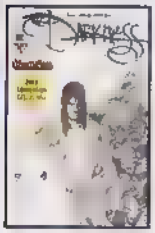


Comics by the Numbers: THE TICKER

32,000
Approximate number of copies the "Smallville" soundtrack CD sold in its first week of release

10,000
Number of CrossGen issues Mile High Comics owner Chuck Rozanski purchases a month just to store in his warehouse

7,500
Number of exclusive insert sheets signed by creators Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith that were included in the first print run of IDW's *30 Days of Night* trade paperback



3,000
Number of Orlando Mega-Con-exclusive copies of Top Cow's *The Darkness* #2. The variant featured an all-new Francis Manapul sketch cover.

61
June issue number of *Spider-Girl*, Marvel's longest running series starring a female, saved from cancellation in April by fan petitions

14
Number of artists who jammed on March's *Action Comics* #800 (including Alex Ross, Jim Lee, Tim Sale and Ed McGuinness)

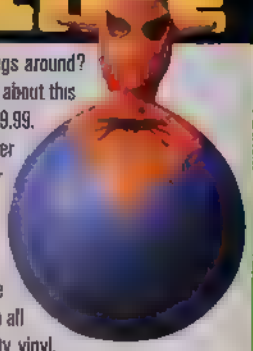
11
Number of Marvel comics featuring Wolverine that will ship in June

3
Consecutive months DC's *Batman* has held the No. 1 spot on Diamond's Top 100 list

0
Number of times before Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's *Batman* that a monthly book by DC held the top slot for three consecutive months (in *Wizard*'s 12-year history)

SOLD ONLINE

WEIRD AND ONLINE



POGO PARKER Want a rubber Spider-Man to wrap your legs around? Whoa, get yer minds outta the gutter, ya pervs! We're talking about this Spider-Man Hopping Toy from 1978 (right), sold online for $29.99. One of those impossible-to-break toys that you bounce all over the place on, this bloated, Brando-ish Spidey is perfect for battling the Leap-Frog.

KRYPTON IRON-ON These days, it's hip for the kiddies to wear reproduction iron-on shirts that can be bought at the mall. For $9.98, you coulda kept it real with a kickass Vintage "Superman II" Iron-On Decal. It features Christopher Reeve in all his blue spandex-clad glory. Zod? Kneel before high quality vinyl, bee-yotch!

HULK BUCKLE Okay, we know Bruce Banner buys oversized purple pants for when he hulks out, but what's up with the Hulk Utility Belt (sold for $16)? Straight outta 1978, it arrives complete with a Gamma Radiation Detector (uh . . it's a little late for that, Bruce). Hulk Wrist Gauntlets (to be like Quasar, we guess) and a hulk Voice Modulator. Yeah, *that'll* make the U-Foes back off.

TURTLE VISION Just when Playmates' Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles toyline has almost vanished from memory, along comes Raphael's Sewer Spy Goggles. Billed as "The Snoopin' Sleuth System," we wish the poor sap who spent 20 bucks good luck "snoopin'" with a huge, fake plastic turtle nose and a green ooze-covered telescope. The kid on the box is even whispering to cartoon turtles! That's a cry for help, people!

RUBBER SOUL Unfortunately for DC musicologists, the Plastic Man/Metamorpho LP from 1975 (left) wasn't much of a collaboration. Plastic Man did his own thing with the "Invasion of the Plastic Men" story, while Metamorpho tackled "Fumo the Fire Giant." Could Sapphire have stepped in and pulled a Yoko Ono? Regardless, these stretchy sounds topped the charts for $9.99 online.

TELL US about your weird online findings! Send photos, etc. to:
SOLD ONLINE
c/o Wizard Entertainment
151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920

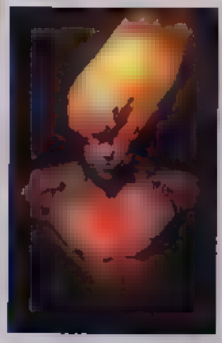
Hoppin' Spidey toy photo courtesy of Suzanne Barraza/Dallas. Plastic Man Record photo courtesy of Derek Shiloh.

TREASURE HUNT

COMICS TO WATCH OUT FOR

IN BACK-ISSUE BINS

Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness are currently prepping for their collaboration on July's *Superman/Batman*, a new ongoing series in the tradition of *World's Finest*. While it's no secret that the super friends previously worked together on *Superman*, they actually teamed up on a yet another title before hopping aboard the DC train. In late 1997, Loeb and McGuinness tackled *Fighting American: Rules of the Game*, a three-issue mini-series from Rob Liefeld's now-defunct Awesome Entertainment featuring Jack Kirby's patriotic superhero. Once *Supes/Bats* #1 drops, expect each issue of this $2.50 series to heat up like a rocket's red glare.



ON THE COMIC RACKS

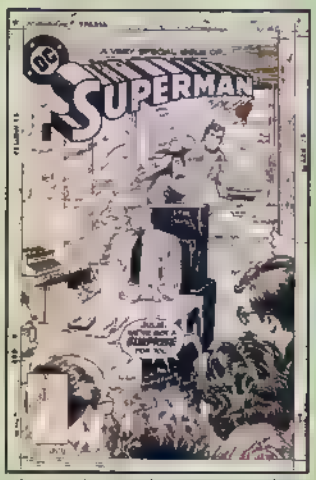
Typhoid Mary, the psychotic sex kitten who stole Matt Murdock's heart before attempting to slice it out, returns on May 21 in the pages of *Daredevil* #47* ($2.99). A schizophrenic mutant with telekinetic and pyrokinetic abilities, Mary nurses a pathological hatred of all men, the Man Without Fear in particular. One of the most disturbing and deadly members of DD's rogues gallery, her reappearance bodes ill for the horned hero, but well for collectors as it leads up to cataclysmic events that writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Alex Maleev have cooked up for *Daredevil* #50. Don't miss out!

*Cover to *Daredevil* #48 shown.

ART ATTACK

Legendary DC editor Julie Schwartz, credited with giving birth to the Silver Age after spearheading the revamps of Green Lantern and the Flash (among others), auctioned off items from his personal collection at a Heritage Comics auction held March 7. Here are a few of the hot-ticket items that lined Schwartz's pockets:

COVER ART FOR SUPERMAN #411: $4,370



Quintessential Silver Age Superman artists Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson drew this 1985 cover (right) as part of a special issue dedicated entirely to Schwartz. Signed by practically everyone in the comics industry–from Alan Moore and Steve Ditko to Jerry Siegel and Jack Kirby–this is a true piece of comic book history and a steal even at four grand.

GIL KANE BIRTHDAY CARD: $1,207.50

Created for Schwartz's 80th birthday in 1995, this card features not only original artwork by the late, great Kane, but also signatures by such luminaries as science fiction writer Harlan Ellison and former Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter.

JOE KUBERT BIRTHDAY CARD: $207

Yet another Silver Age pro pays his respects to Schwartz by creating an original birthday illustration; in this case, a hilarious caricature of Schwartz wearing a ratty Flash costume. Apparently "respect" means something different for Kubert than it does for the rest of us.

SERGIO ARAGONES GET WELL CARD: $172.50

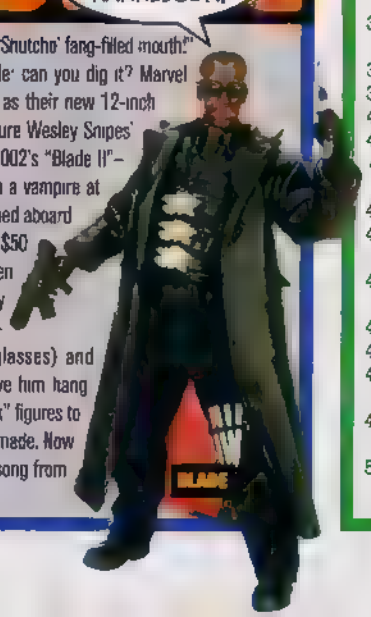
Geez, even the folks at *MAD Magazine* love Julie! Commissioned by the DC staff when Schwartz was hospitalized in 1989, this card features not only hilarious art from Sergio Aragones, but also signatures from Denny O'Neil and Archie Goodwin, among others. ■ **JOSHUA ELDER**

COOLS

PRETTY STUFF THAT'S WORTH MONEY

HEY KIDS, LOOK FOR "BLADE III" CO-STARRING WOODY HARRELSON!

They say this Blade is a bad mutha–"Shutcho' fang-filled mouth!" Whoa, we're only talkin' 'bout Blade; can you dig it? Marvel Studios and Toy Biz certainly can, as their new 12-inch Blade figure–laser-scanned to capture Wesley Snipes' badass, daywalking likeness from 2002's "Blade II"–disappears from shelves faster than a vampire at sunrise. Blade here has already hopped aboard the money train, commanding up to $50 online. This comes as no surprise given his 28 points of articulation, highly detailed accessories (including a die-cast sword and removable sunglasses) and removable leather trench coat. Have him hang out with your similarly attired "Matrix" figures to show them how a REAL movie gets made. Now what's up with a "Blade III" theme song from Isaac Hayes?



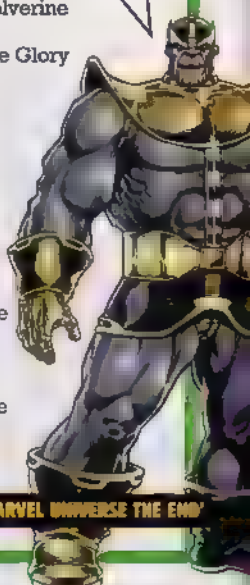
TOP 50

THE BEST-SELLERS OF MARCH

The first number indicates current sales rank, the second, sales rank the previous month. Titles denoted with a ( ) weren't available last month.

1. (*1*) Batman #613 (DC)
2. (*5*) Ultimate Spider-Man #38 (Marvel)
3. (*5*) Ultimate Spider-Man #37 (Marvel)
4. (*4*) Amazing Spider-Man #51 (Marvel)
5. (*6*) New X-Men #138 (Marvel)
6. (*7*) Ultimate X-Men #31 (Marvel)
7. (*7*) Ultimate X-Men #30 (Marvel)
8. (*8*) Uncanny X-Men #420 (Marvel)
9. (*9*) Wolverine #188 (Marvel)
10. (*12*) JLA #79 (DC)
11. (*9*) Wolverine #187 (Marvel)
12. (*11*) X-Treme X-Men #22 (Marvel)
13. (*11*) X-Treme X-Men #23 (Marvel)
14. (*13, 15*) Daredevil #45 (Marvel)
15. ( ) **Marvel Universe: The End #1 (Marvel)** **"Marvel asked me if I wanted to do [an 'End' story] with the whole universe and kill off the entire universe," says writer/artist Jim Starlin of the idea behind his surprise hit mini-series. "Although, Captain Marvel was a lot weirder in his regular book than the way I've got him."**
16. (*17*) Avengers #65 (Marvel)
17. (-) Marvel Universe: The End #2 (Marvel)
18. (*14*) Incredible Hulk #51 (Marvel)
19. (*20*) Fantastic Four #67 (Marvel)
20. (*10*) Transformers: The War Within #6 (Dreamwave Productions)
21. (*19*) Green Arrow #22 (DC)
22. (*18*) Captain America #10 (Marvel)
23. (*18*) Captain America #11 (Marvel)
24. (*21*) Peter Parker: Spider-Man #54 (Marvel)
25. (*22*) Transformers: Armada #9 (Dreamwave Productions)
26. (*24*) G.I. Joe #16 (Devil's Due/Image)
27. (*23*) Truth #5 (Marvel)
28. (*30*) JSA #46 (DC)
29. (*27*) Punisher #23 (Marvel)
30. (*25*) Hulk/Wolverine: Six Hours #4 (Marvel)
31. (*31*) Detective Comics #780 (DC)
32. (*26*) Thundercats: The Return #2 (Wildstorm/DC)
33. (*32*) Spawn #132 (Todd McFarlane Productions/Image)
34. (*35*) Green Lantern #160 (DC)
35. (*35*) Green Lantern #161 (DC)
36. (-) X-Men 2 Movie Prequel: Wolverine (Marvel)
37. (-) Captain America: What Price Glory #1 (Marvel)
38. (*37*) Exiles #23 (Marvel)
39. (*34*) Aquaman #4 (DC)
40. (*37*) Exiles #24 (Marvel)
41. (*39, 40*) Thor #61 (Marvel)
42. (*38*) X-Men Unlimited #43 (Marvel)
43. (-) JLA: Scary Monsters #1 (DC)
44. (*38*) X-Men Unlimited #44 (Marvel)
45. (-) Captain America: What Price Glory #2 (Marvel)
46. (-) X-Men: Ronin #1 (Marvel)
47. (*46*) Superman #191 (DC)
48. (-) Captain America: What Price Glory #3 (Marvel)
49. (*36*) G.I. Joe: Front Line #6 (Devil's Due/Image)
50. (-) Captain America: What Price Glory #4 (Marvel)

MY SHOULDER PADS ARE SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE A SMILE.



HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

1 ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #33

WRITER. Brian Michael Bendis
ARTISTS. Mark Bagley & Art Thibert

It's clear: Venom's back, badder than ever, and the fans have responded in a big way! The first appearance of Ultimate Eddie Brock has been the talk of the convention season so far, so consider yourself lucky if you happen to stumble across a copy anytime soon as they're disappearing from shelves and booths faster than you can say "wheatcakes a-go-go." All of this coupled with the buzz surrounding the upcoming Venom ongoing series, and it's starting to look like 2003 may be the year of the symbiote! **LAST MONTH:** 1

2 BATMAN #608 (RETAILER INCENTIVE)

WRITER. Jeph Loeb
ARTISTS. Jim Lee & Scott Williams

With only 200 (yes, you read that right) copies in existence—all of which landed in the hands of a select few retailers around the country—this variant cover to the already white-hot debut issue of the Loeb/Lee run on *Batman* has fans and collectors foaming at the mouth trying not only to buy a copy, but actually *find* one. And it's clear they'll go to any lengths to nab this ish, given the reports that prices have risen to a staggering $450 in some areas! A prime example of comic book "Bling-Bling!" **LAST MONTH:** 2

3 30 DAYS OF NIGHT #1 (1ST PRINT)

WRITER: Steve Niles
ARTIST: Ben Templesmith

Once again, *30 Days of Night* #1 surprises fans and collectors with another sales phenomenon. Normally, when a trade paperback collects a mini-series, the actual back issues tend to fade in interest. Not the case with *30 Days*, as issue #1 continues to be the indy juggernaut of the back market. **LAST MONTH:** 7

4 ULTIMATE WAR #1

WRITER. Mark Millar
ARTIST: Chris Bachalo

The mini-series which finds Marvel's most popular Ultimate teams going toe-to-toe "Rocky IV" style (c'mon, that one had the best fight) continues to be a comic book force to be reckoned with. Not only has *Ultimate War* #1 created a back-issue craze, but it's spurred interest in back-issue sales of both *The Ultimates* and *Ultimate X-Men*. Talk about influence! **LAST MONTH:** 6

5 Y—THE LAST MAN #1

WRITER: Brian K. Vaughan
ARTISTS: Pia Guerra & José Marzan Jr

Lonely comic fans take note: If you wanna woo the ladies, take some pointers from *Y* writer Brian K. Vaughan. Not only is he writing one of the best—and most sought-after—Vertigo series on the market (where the cast is 99 percent female), but he's also tackling Marvel's resident mutant hottie Mystique in her first ongoing series. **LAST MONTH: N.R. (Not Rated)**

[illegible]

WRITER. Will Pfeifer
ARTIST: Kano

When you've got Geoff Johns praising an under-the-radar book like *H-E-R-O*, it's bound to attract a little attention. But when someone like Johns offers a money-back guarantee if you don't like *H-E-R-O*, it attracts a lot of attention. Retailers underordered the first ish, and now that buzz has built to a fever pitch, expect back-issue prices to rise considerably—guaranteed! **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

7 BATMAN #612

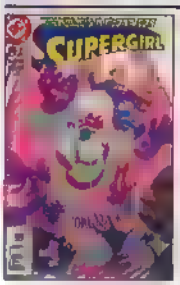
WRITER. Jeph Loeb
ARTISTS: Jim Lee & Scott Williams

Dare we compare the Supes/Bats slugfest in *Batman* #612 to the Holy Grail—*The Dark Knight Returns*? You're damn right we dare, and the proof is among collectors and fans who have bought this ish in a flurry like it featured a Poison Ivy peepshow. Reports of this issue's price rising on the back market are surfacing, so get a copy now! Am-scray! **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

[illegible]

WRITER. Max Allan Collins
ARTIST: Gabriel Rodriguez

You'd think a comic based on TV's #1 drama would've cracked the Top 100 for initial orders, but thanks to low initial orders, fans of this series have been investigating its whereabouts, only to come up with a dead end. Word on the street has interest in this series building, which means a back-market frenzy may be imminent. Could this be IDW's next big hit? **LAST MONTH:** 9



9 SUPERGIRL #76

WRITER. Peter David
ARTISTS: Ed Benes & Alex Lei

Well, it looks like the ongoing *Supergirl* series has ended, but that certainly hasn't put a damper on collector interest in the back issues. Although *Supergirl* #76 serves as the second part of the series' swan song storyline (a.k.a. a "Terrible Two" issue), it was vastly underordered, thus making it a hidden gem that's worth the hunt. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

[illegible]

WRITER: Bill Willingham
ARTISTS: Lan Medina & Steve Leialoha

Despite the recent trade collecting the first storyarc, fans are still loyal to back issues of *Fables* #1! Now, the painted fairy tale variant cover by artist James Jean apparently has collectors dying to get their Doritos® residue-covered fingers on a copy. Although back-issue prices have dipped slightly, you'll be lucky if you find a copy for less than $13 these days. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

THE NEW MUTANTS

Like the Juggernaut, nothing can stop the mania surrounding "X-Men 2"! And with the film introducing more celluloid mutants than you can shake Black Tom's cane at, we've compiled this comprehensive guide to all of the debuting and higher-profile muties! Wanna know which Colossus book you should keep your eye on? Curious about Pyro's defining comic moment? Then read on, X-fans, and pick up these books while they're still cheaper than Xavier's tuition! ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

	THE SCOOP	FIRST APPEARANCE	DEFINING MOMENT	BOOK TO WATCH
NIGHTCRAWLER	A German mutant born with blue fur, a pointed tail and the ability to teleport, Kurt Wagner found acceptance with the X-Men and the priesthood.	Giant-Size X-Men #1	Uncanny X-Men #159: As Dracula manhandles the other X-Men, Nightcrawler forms a cross out of two sticks and stuns the vampire. When Dracula summons lightning bolts to come to his aid, Kurt must use rapid-fire teleportation to avoid the blasts!	Ultimate X-Men #7: Ultimate Nightcrawler makes his hamfing debut as he attempts to escape the Weapon X compund.
COLOSSUS	Piotr (Peter) Rasputin, the X-Men's resident powerhouse thanks to his ability to convert his body to organic steel, left his Russian homeland at the behest of Professor X.	Giant-Size X-Men #1	Uncanny X-Men #128: The mad mutant Proteus has defeated the X-Men and threatens to destroy the world--and only Colossus can stop him. Forced to kill Proteus, the big-hearted Russian farm boy learns a painful lesson about what it means to be a man.	X-Men Unlimited #38: A stand-alone issue by the *Wolverine* creative team of Greg Rucka and Darick Robertson featuring Kitty Pryde reminiscing on the lost love of her life.
ICEMAN	One of the original X-Men, Bobby Drake can shoot powerful ice-blasts from his hands and convert his body into a sub-zero form.	X-Men #1 (1963)	Ultimate War #4: With the Ultimates on the verge of defeating the X-Men, young Bobby Drake comes to the rescue, sending a minus-five, 120-m.p.h. tidal wave of solid ice down upon S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, freezing an entire city in the process!	Uncanny X-Men #340: As Iceman's father lays dying after a beating from mutant hater Graydon Creed, the frosty mutant decides that the X-Men are no longer a priority.
MYSTIQUE	A shape-shifting, blue-skinned mutant, the evil Raven Darkholme has long been a thorn in the side of the X-Men, especially her foster daughter Rogue and alleged son Nightcrawler.	Ms. Marvel #16	Uncanny X-Men #177: On abandoned fairgrounds, Mystique exploits each X-Man's weakness, killing them off one by one! Even though it's revealed to only be a simulation created by Arcade, Mysty proves to be a murderous force to be reckoned with.	Mystique #1: Along with a sexy Joe Linsner cover, *Y--The Last Man* scribe Brian K. Vaughan immerses the shape-shifter in shady spy action.
PYRO	A former Gothic romance novelist, Australian no-goodnik St. John Allerdyce possesses the psionic ability to control any fire, able to make them grow in size and intensity.	Uncanny X-Men #141	Cable #87: Dying from the Legacy virus, the sadistic mutant develops a conscience that leads him to save the mutant-hating Senator Kelly from his former teammates in the Brotherhood. "Make it end," he begs with his dying breath. "The hatred...the death..."	Incredible Hulk #369: In a tale by writer Peter David and *Darkness* artist Dale Keown, Pyro squares off against the star of that other Marvel summer blockbuster.
LADY DEATHSTRIKE	One of Wolverine's deadliest foes, the cybernetically enhanced (and mentally unstable) Yuriko Oyama has five adamantium claws that replace her fingers on each hand.	Daredevil #197 (as Yuriko), Alpha Flight #33 (as Lady O)	Uncanny X-Men #205: Fresh from receiving her cybernetic enhancements on Mojoworld, Deathstrike and Wolverine engage in a savage duel that for Yuriko is a matter of honor. In the end, there stands only one victor in the blood-stained snow.	Wolverine #45: Marc Silvestri illustrates a Times Square battle royal between Lady Deathstrike, Wolverine and Sabretooth! Claws and blood galore!

VENOM CHECKLIST

For a guy who started out as a tiny ball of black ooze from an alien world, Venom's come a long way.

After a full-fledged debut in *Amazing Spider-Man* #300, Venom (a.k.a. oafish former *Daily Bugle* photographer Eddie Brock and the alien symbiote from the Beyonder's Warworld) went on to terrorize Spidey for several years before growing a ridiculously long tongue and landing his own unrelenting succession of mini-series, beginning with 1993's *Venom: Lethal Protector*. (With each issue of the six-issue mini sporting a $2.95 cover price, Marvel made a killing.) However, forced attempts to make the character into a hero led to overexposure (such as tepid appearances in books like *Silver Sable* and *Nightwatch*), killing his badass appeal and depleting his fan base.

Today, thanks to a revitalizing ultimazation in the pages of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Venom's also back in the spotlight in the regular Marvel U. with his first-ever regular series. We've compiled every single Venom comic book appearance from the past 15 years, so grab a black pen and hit the bins!

BY KARL CRAMER AND JESSE THOMPSON

COVER TO VENOM #1 BY SAM KIETH

ADVENTURES OF SPIDER-MAN

- ❑ Adventures of Spider-Man #11
- ❑ Adventures of Spider-Man #12

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #298 (cameo only)
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #299 (cameo only)
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #300 (1st full appearance)
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #315
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #316
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #317
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #331
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #332
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #333
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #344
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #345
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #346
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #347
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #361
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #362
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #363
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #373
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #374
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #375
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #378
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #379
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #380
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #384
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #388
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man Annual #23
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man Annual #25 (1st solo story)
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man Annual #26

(VOLUME TWO)

- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #12
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #19
- ❑ Amazing Spider-Man #22

AVENGERS

- ❑ Avengers Annual #18

BACKLASH/ SPIDER-MAN

(IMAGE/MARVEL)

- ❑ Backlash/Spider-Man #1
- ❑ Backlash/Spider-Man #2

BEAVIS & BUTTHEAD

- ❑ Beavis & Butthead #3

CODE OF HONOR

- ❑ Code of Honor #4

DAREDEVIL

- ❑ Daredevil #321
- ❑ Daredevil #322 (Eddie Brock)
- ❑ Daredevil #331

DARKHAWK

- ❑ Darkhawk #13
- ❑ Darkhawk #14

DC/MARVEL: ALL ACCESS

(DC/MARVEL)

- ❑ DC/Marvel: All Access #1

DC VS. MARVEL

(DC/MARVEL)

- ❑ DC vs. Marvel #1 (appears in one panel)

DEATHTRAP: THE VAULT

- ❑ Deathtrap: The Vault (graphic novel)

GIANT-SIZE MINI-MARVELS

- ❑ Giant-Size Mini-Marvels #1

HULK VS. VENOM

- ❑ Hulk vs. Venom #1

VENOM VS. POISON

One's a villain now on the comeback trail, the other's a band now appearing on VH1 Classic. But how do the two toxins really shake down?

Introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* #298 lurking in the shadows

Introduced with "Look What the Cat Dragged In" wearing too much eyeshadow

EDGE: VENOM

Symbiotically bonded to Eddie Brock

Known for the single "Unskinny Bop"

EDGE: POISON

Vulnerable to sonic attacks

Their songs make ears bleed

EDGE: VENOM

Turned off longtime fans with a long, saliva-soaked tongue

Turned off longtime fans with the gospel-soaked "Native Tongue"

EDGE: VENOM

His books clog quarter bins everywhere

Their albums clog bargain bins everywhere

EDGE: POISON

DA WINNAH: VENOM! For Poison, every rose has its ass kicked!

Poison photo courtesy of Everett Collection.

INCREDIBLE HULK
- ❑ Incredible Hulk #413 (Venom illusion only)

IRON MAN
- ❑ Iron Man #301
- ❑ Iron Man #302

MARVEL ADVENTURES
- ❑ Marvel Adventures #2

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #117
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #118
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #119
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #120
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #121
- ❑ Marvel Comics Presents #122

NIGHTWATCH
- ❑ Nightwatch #5
- ❑ Nightwatch #6

NOVA
(VOLUME THREE)
- ❑ Nova #7

QUASAR
- ❑ Quasar #6

PETER PARKER: SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Peter Parker: Spider-Man #9
- ❑ Peter Parker: Spider-Man #10
- ❑ Peter Parker: Spider-Man #12
- ❑ Peter Parker: Spider-Man #13
- ❑ Peter Parker: Spider-Man #16

RUNE/SILVER SURFER
(MALIBU/MARVEL)
- ❑ Rune/Silver Surfer (appears in one panel)

RUNE VS. VENOM
(MALIBU/MARVEL)
- ❑ Rune vs. Venom #1

SILVER SABLE
- ❑ Silver Sable #18
- ❑ Silver Sable #19

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Spectacular Spider-Man #201
- ❑ Spectacular Spider-Man #202
- ❑ Spectacular Spider-Man #203
- ❑ Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #12

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN SUPER SPECIAL
- ❑ Spectacular Spider-Man Super Special #1

SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Spider-Man #35
- ❑ Spider-Man #36
- ❑ Spider-Man #37
- ❑ Spider-Man #52
- ❑ Spider-Man #53

SPIDER-MAN: THE ARACHNIS PROJECT
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #1
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #2
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #3
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #4
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #5
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Arachnis Project #6

SPIDER-MAN/BADROCK
(MARVEL/IMAGE)
- ❑ Spider-Man/Badrock

SPIDER-MAN HOLIDAY SPECIAL
- ❑ Spider-Man Holiday Special 1995

SPIDER-MAN SPECIAL EDITION
- ❑ Spider-Man Special Edition #1 ("Trial of Venom" UNICEF premium)

SPIDER-MAN SUPER SPECIAL
- ❑ Spider-Man Super Special #1

SPIDER-MAN 2099 MEETS SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Spider-Man 2099 Meets Spider-Man

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED
- ❑ Spider-Man Unlimited #1
- ❑ Spider-Man Unlimited #2

SPIDER-MAN: THE VENOM AGENDA
- ❑ Spider-Man: The Venom Agenda #1

SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE
- ❑ Spirits of Vengeance #4
- ❑ Spirits of Vengeance #5
- ❑ Spirits of Vengeance #6

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #33 (1st Ultimate Eddie Brock)
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #34
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #35
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #36
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #37 (1st Ultimate Venom)
- ❑ Ultimate Spider-Man #38

UNCANNY ORIGINS
- ❑ Uncanny Origins #7

VENOM
- ❑ Venom #1 (new Tsunami series)
- ❑ Venom #2

VENOM: ALONG CAME A SPIDER
- ❑ Venom: Along Came a Spider #1
- ❑ Venom: Along Came a Spider #2
- ❑ Venom: Along Came a Spider #3
- ❑ Venom: Along Came a Spider #4

VENOM: CARNAGE UNLEASHED
- ❑ Venom: Carnage Unleashed #1
- ❑ Venom: Carnage Unleashed #2
- ❑ Venom: Carnage Unleashed #3
- ❑ Venom: Carnage Unleashed #4

VENOM: THE ENEMY WITHIN
- ❑ Venom: The Enemy Within #1
- ❑ Venom: The Enemy Within #2
- ❑ Venom: The Enemy Within #3

VENOM: FINALE
- ❑ Venom: Finale #1
- ❑ Venom: Finale #2
- ❑ Venom: Finale #3

VENOM: FUNERAL PYRE
- ❑ Venom: Funeral Pyre #1
- ❑ Venom: Funeral Pyre #2
- ❑ Venom: Funeral Pyre #3

VENOM: THE HUNGER
- ❑ Venom: The Hunger #1
- ❑ Venom: The Hunger #2
- ❑ Venom: The Hunger #3
- ❑ Venom: The Hunger #4

VENOM: THE HUNTED
- ❑ Venom: The Hunted #1
- ❑ Venom: The Hunted #2
- ❑ Venom: The Hunted #3

VENOM: LETHAL PROTECTOR
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #1
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #2
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #3
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #4
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #5
- ❑ Venom: Lethal Protector #6

VENOM: LICENSE TO KILL
- ❑ Venom: License to Kill #1
- ❑ Venom: License to Kill #2
- ❑ Venom: License to Kill #3

VENOM: THE MACE
- ❑ Venom: The Mace #1
- ❑ Venom: The Mace #2
- ❑ Venom: The Mace #3

VENOM: THE MADNESS
- ❑ Venom: The Madness #1
- ❑ Venom: The Madness #2
- ❑ Venom: The Madness #3

VENOM: NIGHTS OF VENGEANCE
- ❑ Venom: Night of Vengeance #1
- ❑ Venom: Night of Vengeance #2
- ❑ Venom: Night of Vengeance #3
- ❑ Venom: Night of Vengeance #4

VENOM: ON TRIAL
- ❑ Venom: On Trial #1
- ❑ Venom: On Trial #2
- ❑ Venom: On Trial #3

VENOM: SEED OF DARKNESS
- ❑ Venom: Seed of Darkness #-1 (Flashback issue)

VENOM: SEPARATION ANXIETY
- ❑ Venom: Separation Anxiety #1
- ❑ Venom: Separation Anxiety #2
- ❑ Venom: Separation Anxiety #3
- ❑ Venom: Separation Anxiety #4

VENOM: SIGN OF THE BOSS
- ❑ Venom: Sign of the Boss #1
- ❑ Venom: Sign of the Boss #2

VENOM: SINNER TAKES ALL
- ❑ Venom: Sinner Takes All #1
- ❑ Venom: Sinner Takes All #2
- ❑ Venom: Sinner Takes All #3
- ❑ Venom: Sinner Takes All #4
- ❑ Venom: Sinner Takes All #5

VENOM SUPER SPECIAL
- ❑ Venom Super Special #1

VENOM: TOOTH AND CLAW
- ❑ Venom: Tooth and Claw #1
- ❑ Venom: Tooth and Claw #2
- ❑ Venom: Tooth and Claw #3

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #18 (behind-the-scenes preview)
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #94
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #95
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #98
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #101
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #102
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #103
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #118
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man #119
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man Annual #7
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man Annual #8

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN SUPER SPECIAL
- ❑ Web of Spider-Man Super Special #1

WHAT IF?
(VOLUME TWO)
- ❑ What If? #31
- ❑ What If? #44

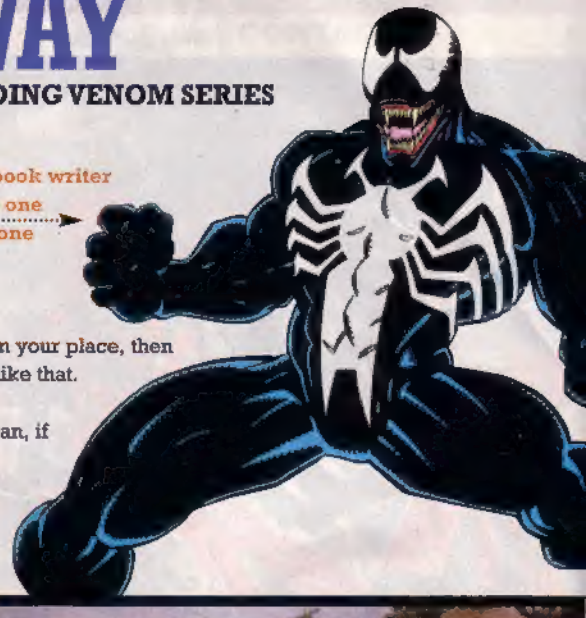
WILD THING
(MARVEL U.K.)
- ❑ Wild Thing #1
- ❑ Wild Thing #2

THE HOTSEAT

This Month Featuring:

DANIEL WAY

WRITER OF MARVEL'S ONGOING VENOM SERIES



WIZARD: Daniel, you're a chef turned professional comic book writer with *Venom* and your *Tangled Web* stories, but I've got one really important question for you: Have you ever given anyone food poisoning?

WAY: On purpose?

Or on accident.

No way, man. If you give someone food poisoning they shut down your place, then you have to give them all these samples—hair, skin, stool...stuff like that.

Sounds fun...

[*Pauses*] I'd rather wash my hands than try to sh– in a cup. I mean, if it's left up to me.

Ever take a dump in your pants?

I had sushi awhile back and that was the closest I've come recently. The less said about that experience the better.

I feel you. Got any big plans for the convention season?

I got a **white-trash bash** going down before the Charlotte Heroes Con convention [June 13-15] at a campground. There's going to be fire, liquor and danger.

I'm there.

There's even a roller coaster at the theme park just down the road.

Cool. So, who do you want to kill in comics?

You mean characters, right?

Or editors.

[*Long pause*] I gotta go with **Superman**. He's invulnerable, right? He's this immovable stone you have to break sh– against. I can't write that—I'd write around it. I need Adequateman or Moderateman—**someone with problems**. That's something I can work with.

When's the last time you were in a fistfight?

About two weeks ago...there was fire, liquor and danger...

Kind of a running theme with you, huh?

It's a trademark.

When's the last time you did something illegal?

[*Laughs*] Just now...

Wanna tell me...?

No.

Fair enough. Last question: who's your favorite writer in comics?

Oooooo...Mark Millar is good. I always like *Ultimates*. Pete Milligan's stuff is great. Let's go with Zeb Wells, though. Everything he does is a John Hughes movie.

You like John Hughes?

Don't start, man...

■ MIKE COTTON

Michael Jackson and Bulwersmo Hulks photos courtesy Everett Collection.